

LANCASHIRE
COUNTY LIBRARY

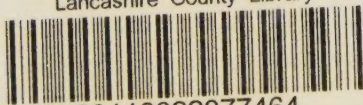
AUTHOR	LONSDALE F
TITLE	last of Mrs. Chayney.
BOOK No.	644848.
CLASS No.	822.91

1308

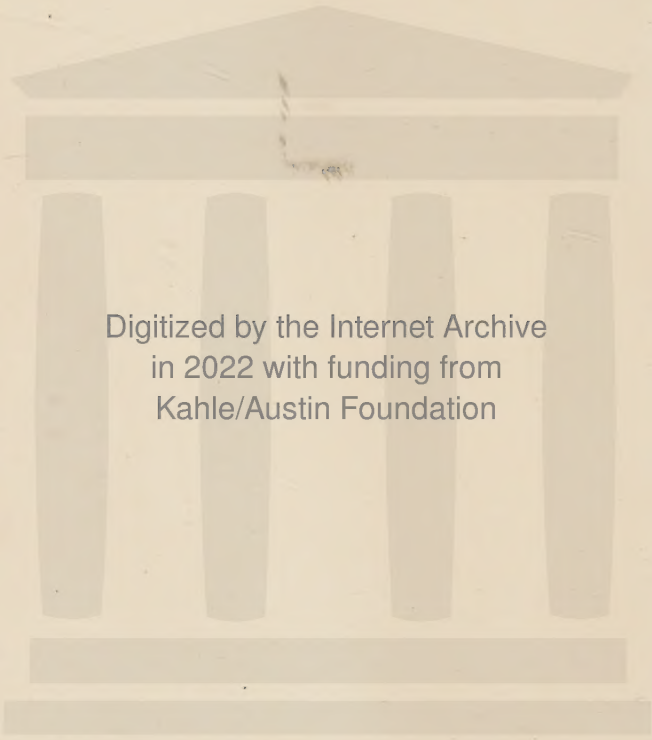
RS

LL 60

Lancashire County Library



30118092077464



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation



THE LAST OF MRS. CHEYNEY

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY

FREDERICK LONSDALE

COPYRIGHT, 1925, BY FREDERICK LONSDALE

REVISED AND RE-WRITTEN, 1929, AS AN ACTING EDITION
BY FREDERICK LONSDALE

COPYRIGHT, 1929, BY FREDERICK LONSDALE

All rights reserved

SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.

26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.2

59 CROSS STREET, MANCHESTER

SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.

25 WEST 45TH STREET, NEW YORK, U.S.A.

811 WEST 7TH STREET, LOS ANGELES, CAL.

SAMUEL FRENCH (CANADA) LTD.

480 UNIVERSITY AVENUE, TORONTO

092077464

The fee for the representation of this play by amateurs is Five Guineas, payable in advance to—

Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd.,

26 Southampton Street,

Strand, London, W.C.2,

or their authorized agents, who, upon payment of the fee, will issue a licence for the performance to take place.

No performance may be given unless this licence has been obtained.

In the event of more than one performance being given by amateurs, the fee for each and every representation subsequent to the first is Four Guineas. This reduction only applies when the performances are consecutive (evening following evening, or evening following matinée) and at the same theatre or hall.

Character costumes and wigs used in the performance of plays contained in French's Acting Edition may be hired or purchased from Messrs. CHARLES H. FOX, Ltd., 184 High Holborn, London, W.C.1.

S311

THE LAST OF MRS. CHEYNEY

Produced at the St. James's Theatre, London, on Tuesday, September 22, 1925, with the following cast of characters :

LORD DILLING	<i>Gerald du Maurier.</i>
LORD ELTON	<i>Dawson Milward.</i>
CHARLES (a Butler)	<i>Ronald Squire.</i>
HON. WILLIE WYNTON	<i>Basil Loder.</i>
WILLIAM (a Footman)	<i>Guy Fletcher.</i>
GEORGE (a Footman)	<i>Frank Lawton.</i>
JIM (a Chauffeur)	<i>E. H. Paterson.</i>
ROBERTS (Mrs. Ebley's Butler)	<i>A. Harding Steerman.</i>
MRS. CHEYNEY	<i>Gladys Cooper.</i>
LADY FRINTON	<i>Ellis Jeffreys.</i>
MRS. EBLEY (Cousin to Lord Dilling)	<i>May Whitty.</i>
HON. MRS. WYNTON	<i>Mabel Sealby.</i>
JOAN	<i>Gladys Gray.</i>
MARY	<i>Violet Campbell.</i>

SCENES

ACT I

Drawing-room in Mrs. Cheyney's house at Goring.

ACT II

SCENE 1.—A Room in Mrs. Ebley's country house.

SCENE 2.—Mrs. Ebley's bedroom.

ACT III

Loggia of Mrs. Ebley's house.

In the original production the times in representation were :

ACT I.—Forty minutes. Interval, twelve minutes.

ACT II, Scene 1.—Thirty minutes. Interval, two minutes.

ACT II, Scene 2.—Eighteen minutes. Interval, twelve minutes.

ACT III.—Thirty-nine minutes.



THE LAST OF MRS. CHEYNEY.

ACT I

SCENE.—Room at MRS. CHEYNEY'S house at Goring. For details of the scene, see illustration and plan.

TIME.—Afternoon.

The orchestra plays one verse of "A May Morning"—at the rise of the curtain the song is being concluded and is heard off to the accompaniment of a piano. (As the orchestra finishes the first verse singer off stage commences singing last four lines of the last verse.)

(CHARLES is discovered at window up C.—he listens a second; goes down C. below the sofa R. and rings the bell below the fireplace R., and returns to window C. WILLIAM, a footman, enters from door L., carrying two plates of sandwiches; he places them on the table up L. which is already laid with cakes in dishes and stands, chocolate éclairs and biscuits and a dish of fruit. A decanter of "Kirsch" stands R. of the fruit, which is C. of the table. GEORGE follows the other footman. He is carrying a large silver tray containing a decanter of whisky, a decanter of sherry, jug with lemonade, syphon, four large glasses and four cocktail glasses. The syphon is lying on its side, and the tray is generally slovenly arranged. He comes behind the settee L.C.)

GEORGE. Where shall I put these?

CHARLES (*points to the table R.C. behind the sofa*). I suggest there.

GEORGE (*crosses to table R.*). My word, some of those singers out there have got 'orrible voices! (*Puts tray on table R.C.*)

(WILLIAM comes down to table down L. and arranges cups and saucers on table and tray.)

CHARLES (*as he comes down stage*). A charity concert, without 'orrible voices would not be a charity concert, George! By the way, it's a small matter, but there is an "h" in 'orrible!

GEORGE. Where I come from there ain't!

CHARLES (*down L.C.*). Quite! (*He motions to WILLIAM that his tray is all right.*) And I dare say it does quite well without it!

(*Exit WILLIAM L.*)

GEORGE. Anyway, I never believed I would see a garden so full of swells as I have to-day. I've called everybody "my lord" and I ain't been contradicted once!

CHARLES. The English middle-classes are much too well-bred to argue!

GEORGE. Who was the old bloke who spoke at the beginning?

CHARLES (*crossing to below GEORGE at the table R.C.*). The old bloke was His Grace the Duke of Bristol! (*GEORGE moves away behind CHARLES.*) Look.

(*He calls GEORGE's attention to the careless manner of the arrangement of the glasses and syphon. He puts them r.ght.*)

GEORGE (*who has gone L. to door*). That's funny! If you didn't know he was, and saw his picture in a Sunday paper, you'd say, "There's them Bolshies at it again!"

(*GEORGE is standing at door L. He has opened the door ready to go out.*)

CHARLES. You would!

(*CHARLES, at the table R.C. behind the sofa, during his following speeches, fills the cigarette-box, which is almost empty, with cigarettes from two boxes—1 Virginian, 1 Turkish.*)

Nevertheless, we have with us to-day what may be known as the social goods! Lady Mary Sindlay, one of our leading hostesses: rich, charming, and modest. In fact, one might almost describe her as a lady! Lady Joan Houghton, twenty-three, courageous and beautiful, a woman who calls a spade a bloody spade and means it!

GEORGE (*closing the door and coming down L. to front of settee L.C. laughs*). I like her! She said to me out there just now, "Willie, 'and me a match!"

CHARLES. She was born with a natural desire to please every one! And then we have Mrs. Wynton, the honourable of such, young, attractive, and a person. She married one of the most stupid of God's creatures; but rumour has it she has remained faithful to him! She is either a very good woman, George, or very nervous!

GEORGE. I like the old party they call Maria!

CHARLES. In her way, George, she's a darling! Her business in life has been to find people; she has a habit of finding them on Tuesday and serving them up on a gold salver on Wednesday, but should they fail her by being unamusing, it is she who closes the drain on them as they go down it on the Thursday! It was she who found your mistress!

GEORGE. The old one with the painted face and the pearls—I don't think much of her!

CHARLES. She is Mrs. Ebley. It is said of her that, seated in her chair one day looking into her glass, she spied a double chin;

at that moment her last of many lovers called to pay his respects; looking into that glass and without flinching, she said, "I am not at home!"

(CHARLES *has filled the cigarette-box. He now replenishes the match-stand from a large box of "Club Matches."*)

GEORGE. Good for 'er!

CHARLES. With the knowledge that given suitable conditions even a Bishop's eyesight can be affected, she kept to her pearls, but became respectable! Her house to-day is the most exclusive of all our English homes!

GEORGE. I must say I like 'em when they get away with it! They all didn't make half a fuss of that tall bloke when he came in!

CHARLES. That tall bloke was Lord Elton—a rich, eligible bachelor, an intimate friend of royalty, and a man of considerable importance. Dukes open their doors personally when he calls upon them; the aspirants to the higher life leave theirs open, in the hope that it might rain and he might be driven in for shelter! (*He has now filled the match-stand.*)

GEORGE. He sounds great.

CHARLES. To have got him here to-day, George, is a triumph; he so seldom goes anywhere! (*He goes up and looks to the top of piano and arranges the books and illustrated papers, etc.*)

GEORGE. What do you think brought him here?

CHARLES (*giving a final eye to the drink table*). You've heard the singing at this charity concert, so the intelligent assumption is, he finds your mistress a very attractive young lady.

GEORGE (*goes more c. by stool R. of settee*). She's a knock out. The feller who couldn't do the card trick—I like him—he makes me laugh. Who was he?

CHARLES (*leaning with elbow on the piano*). He? He's quite of another kind! He's my Lord Dilling. Young, rich, attractive and clever! Had he been born a poor man, he might have died a great one! But he has allowed life to spoil him! He has a reputation with women that is extremely bad, consequently, as hope is a quality possessed of all women, women ask him everywhere! I would describe him as a man who has kept more husbands at home than any other man of modern times.

GEORGE. Do you like him? (L.C.)

CHARLES. Personally, I hate him. Besides, he's too clever, George, for any man to like very much! And too unscrupulous for any woman not to love very much!

GEORGE (*going up c., nearer windows*). 'As he got an eye to my mistress?

CHARLES. He has got two eyes to your mistress!

GEORGE. She don't like him?

CHARLES. Not in the way that he would like her to, George. Unless I am very much mistaken, she is a young lady with two eyes to herself!

(GEORGE sees JOAN approaching; he signs to CHARLES and goes to door L. CHARLES is also going out; he is L.C. behind settee when JOAN enters, with cigarette in long holder, c. from R.)

JOAN (up c.). Holding cigarette in holder towards CHARLES). Do something with that for me, Charles, please!

CHARLES. Yes, my lady! (He takes the cigarette out of the holder and hands it to GEORGE.)

(GEORGE takes the cigarette from CHARLES and exits L., closing the door.)

JOAN (going over to table behind sofa R.C.). Charles,

(CHARLES comes a little more to c.)

who the devil told those women out there that they can sing?

CHARLES. Their music teacher, my lady, when she found they had the money to pay for lessons in advance!

JOAN (at table R.C.). I like that. May I use it as my own?

CHARLES. With pleasure, my lady!

JOAN (putting fresh cigarette in holder from silver box on table). By the way, are your ears burning?

CHARLES. No, my lady!

JOAN. They should be; we've been talking about you for the last quarter of an hour; we are intrigued, Charles! Tell me, have you always been a butler?

CHARLES. I never remember allowing myself the privilege of forgetting it once, my lady. (He moves to door L.)

JOAN. Oh! Likely to? (Getting a match.)

CHARLES (at door L.). I shouldn't know how to, my lady! (He is about to go off, having opened the door.)

(MARY enters through windows up c.)

MARY. Oh! Charles, may I have some tea, please?

CHARLES. It will be here in a moment!

(MARY goes to table up L. and helps herself to a sandwich. CHARLES exits L., closing the door.)

JOAN. Isn't he divine? (Strikes the match and lights cigarette.)

MARY. Who? Oh, Charles! Don't be absurd, Joan!

JOAN. Every time I see that man I realize how dreadfully our family is in need of a drop of new blood!

(JOAN goes down stage across the lower end of the sofa to R.)

MARY (laughing, comes to the stool below table R.C.). How very attractive Mrs. Cheyney has made this house!

JOAN (*sits down stage on arm of sofa R.*). Terribly! What a darling she is, Mary!

MARY. I like her enormously! By the way, don't you think it's rather amusing that the pompous Elton, who never goes anywhere, should be always here?

JOAN. I know! You don't think that sweet Mrs. Cheyney would marry that prig, do you?

MARY. Being Lady Elton would have certain advantages?

JOAN. Heavens! Think of waking up in the morning and finding Elton alongside of one!

MARY. One wouldn't!

JOAN. That's true!

MARY (*sitting on the stool behind sofa*). Well, it's all very amusing! Elton at a charity concert, and of all people in the world, Arthur Dilling!

JOAN. I have been watching Mrs. Cheyney, and she appears not to be the least impressed by Arthur!

MARY. I know. It's frightfully good for him; poor darling, he can't understand it. It's something that has never happened to him before.

JOAN. Well, I can't understand any woman preferring Elton to Arthur.

MARY. If a woman has ideas of marriage, there wouldn't be much reason to waste time on Arthur.

(WILLIE WYNTON *enters from window up C.*)

WILLIE. Ah, there you are! (*Puts his hat on the piano and crosses above the settee L.C. to table down L.; he finds only tea cups.*) The first part of the concert is over; and if the second part isn't better than the first, the garden will be strewn with bodies.

(JOAN *rises and sits down stage end of the sofa R.*)

MARY. Don't grumble, Willie; it's sweet of Mrs. Cheyney to have lent her garden, and we must help her.

WILLIE (*returning behind the settee to the piano up R.*). I'm not grumbling; I'm just a poor, disappointed fellow who hardly ever finds anything right! (*Catches sight of himself in the framed mirror on the piano.*) Oh! Lord, how I hate my face!

JOAN. Supposing you had to live with it, like your wife has.

WILLIE. I never thought of that. I'll give her a present.

(WILLIAM *enters L. with teapot on salver. He places the teapot on the table down L. and exits.*)

MARY. Hurrah! (*To JOAN.*), Tea, darling. (*She rises and crosses below the settee L.C. to the table L. and pours out tea.*)

WILLIE (*finding the whisky and soda at table R.C. and helping himself*). I say, apparently our Mrs. Cheyney is a rich woman!

MARY. Obviously!

WILLIE. Who actually is Mrs. Cheyney (*puts in the soda*), Mary?

MARY (*pouring out tea*). Mrs. Cheyney is the widow of a rich Australian; meaning to stay in England only a little, she liked us all so much, she has decided to settle amongst us!

WILLIE. Settle Elton seems to me to be more accurate.

MARY. Give that to Joan. (*She holds out a cup.*)

(WILLIE *puts down his glass on the tray.*)

WILLIE. Right-o! (*Crosses behind settee L.C. to MARY, and takes the cup.*)

JOAN. You think he is in love with her?

WILLIE. I'm positive! I'll tell you another bloke who isn't far off it, too! (*Crossing to JOAN, behind settee L.C. and down c. to stool behind sofa R.*)

JOAN. Arthur?

WILLIE. That's right. (*Hands cup of tea to JOAN over back of sofa.*) But she's heard too much about him; she's not having any. My word, I wish I had a quarter of that fellow's brains! (*Taking up his glass from the table R.C.*)

MARY. What would you do with them if you had, Willie?

WILLIE (*coming below stool R.C. behind sofa*). Well, I wouldn't waste time like he's doing; it's a crime to see that feller dissipating himself to pieces like he is doing! Thirty thousand a year and no occupation has done him in all right! (*He sits on the stool.*)

JOAN. He enjoys life.

WILLIE. Not he. He's exhausted nearly everything that there is in this life for him.

(MARY, who has poured out a cup of tea for herself, comes below the settee L.C.)

MARY. Some one said the other day he's drinking, rather. Is that true? (*Sits on settee L.C. at L. end.*)

WILLIE. I'm afraid it is! Pity, because with all his faults he's such a damn good fellow!

JOAN. I adore him!

(MARIA (LADY FRINTON) and MRS. WYNTON enter from windows c., coming from R. MARIA on MRS. WYNTON'S L.)

MARIA (*down c.*). Tea! Divine! Enjoying the concert, Willie?

(WILLIE rises, putting his glass on the table R.C. MRS. WYNTON goes behind settee to down L. and pours out tea.)

WILLIE (R.C.). Like hell!

MARIA (c.). Darling! And we got it up for you! It's charming. Don't you like the dear, fat, sweet creature who played the violin?

WILLIE. In the days of my early ancestors they would have thrown stones at her!

MARIA. And how right they would have been! The beast, I thought she was never going to stop!

WILLIE. Have some tea, darling?

MARIA. Tea. Yes, please.

(WILLIE goes behind MARIA and behind the settee L.C. to L. and takes a cup of tea from MRS. WYNTON. MARIA moves on her R. and sits on the stool below the table R.C.)

MRS. WYNTON. The one amusing thing was when Arthur suggested to Elton he should play his little piece. (Gives cup of tea to WILLIE.)

JOAN. How pompous Elton looked when he said it!

WILLIE (crossing to MARIA with the tea). That's what I like about Arthur. We're all such snobs about Elton, and he simply doesn't care a damn about him!

(WILLIE takes up his glass from table R.C.)

MRS. WYNTON. You're swearing rather a lot to-day, Willie!

(MRS. WYNTON pours out her own cup of tea.)

WILLIE. Sorry, darling, but I've been sitting next to Joan all the afternoon!

(WILLIE finishes his drink and puts his glass down, standing above table R.C.)

MARIA. I wish I knew for certain whether Elton hates Arthur more than Arthur despises Elton?

(ARTHUR (LORD DILLING) enters from up C., coming from R.)

Tea, Arthur?

ARTHUR (C., putting his hat on the piano). A whisky and soda! Give me one, Willie!

WILLIE. I will! (Pours out whisky and soda.)

ARTHUR (coming down C. and going L. to MRS. WYNTON. Lifts her pearls). Imitation of the opulent Sybil?

MRS. WYNTON. What do you mean?

ARTHUR. You have got them all on!

MRS. WYNTON. Naturally one wears the pearls given one by one's husband! (Moves in front of and sits on the settee L.C., R. of MARY.)

MARIA. And Willie likes her to wear them; they advertise you, don't they, Willie?

(ARTHUR goes over to WILLIE at table R.C.)

WILLIE. In what way? (Gives ARTHUR the whisky and soda.)

MARIA. A trap for other women, darling! If a man is prepared

to give the woman he married such divine pearls, what would he be prepared to give the woman he loves?

WILLIE (*crossing behind ARTHUR to back of settee L.C.*). Nothing of the sort! I'm much too mean to be unfaithful! (*Pats his wife's shoulder as he passes to L. of settee and remains L.*)

ARTHUR (*laughing*). I like that, Willie!

(ARTHUR *puts more whisky into his glass from the decanter.*)

MARIA. What brings you to a charity concert, Arthur?

ARTHUR. A misjudged "Kruschen" feeling. (*Examines the decanter of whisky.*)

MARY. Is that what brought Elton here?

ARTHUR (*with his glass in hand, comes over to the stool R. of settee L.C.*). Elton, I take it, finds Mrs. Cheyney very entertaining.

MARIA. Do you think he means to marry her?

ARTHUR. With the consent of his solicitor and his mother, he may in time propose to her!

JOAN. Why don't you marry her, Arthur?

ARTHUR. She wouldn't have me!

MARIA. You should ask her!

ARTHUR. As I could never make any woman happy for more than a year, I wouldn't be so impertinent! (*Sits on the stool R. of settee L.C.*)

MRS. WYNTON. You should try!

ARTHUR. I have! And miserably failed! My maximum so far has been eight months. The last two of those months I shall never forget! I should hate any woman again to watch me suffering as that poor creature did!

JOAN (*laughing*). I heard you described the other evening as a dishonourable man with thirty thousand a year!

MARIA. No man with thirty thousand a year who can write his name could ever be dishonourable!

ARTHUR. Quite right, Maria!

(WILLIE *laughs.*)

MRS. WYNTON (*to WILLIE*). What are you making those curious noises for?

WILLIE. I'm laughing! I'm such an ass myself, I love anyone who isn't!

(CHARLES *enters L. He is going out by window.*)

ARTHUR. Charles (*holds up glass*), you might put that down for me, please.

CHARLES (*taking ARTHUR'S glass*). Yes, m'lord. (*He puts the glass on table R.C.*)

MARIA. Ever tried tea, Arthur?

ARTHUR. Tea, what for?

(MRS. WYNTON and MARY give their cups to WILLIE, who puts them on the table L. CHARLES is going off up C.)

Charles!

(CHARLES comes down a little C.)

Been able to remember where we have met before?

CHARLES. Unfortunately I have not, my lord!

ARTHUR (*smiling*). You might try!

CHARLES. I am, my lord!

(CHARLES exits up C., through the windows and off to R.)

MARIA. What does that odd conversation mean?

ARTHUR. Where I have seen that feller before, I don't know, but I have seen him, and I'd give a devil of a lot to know where!

MRS. WYNTON. Does it worry you, then?

ARTHUR. It's interesting to know why a gentleman should be a butler, that's all!

MARIA. Not really! Does anyone know where Elton and Mrs. Cheyney are?

ARTHUR. I left Elton patronizing the tea that Mrs. Cheyney was giving the villagers! (*Lights a cigarette from his own case with his own match.*)

JOAN (*getting up reaching over the back of the sofa, putting her cup on the table and sitting again*). I do wish he would marry Mrs. Cheyney. It would be such fun.

(LORD ELTON enters C. from L. and puts his hat on the piano up R.)

MARIA. My dear! some tea?

(ELTON comes down C., and takes MARIA'S cup.)

ELTON. Many thanks, but I have had some!

ARTHUR. A whisky and soda, Elton?

ELTON. Thank you, no! (*He goes up to the piano and puts the cup down.*)

ARTHUR. We were just discussing marriage, Elton!

ELTON (*coming C.*). And have you come to any conclusion?

ARTHUR. We have! We have decided you should!

ELTON (*standing C.*). Indeed! For you to take such an interest in me is flattering!

ARTHUR. Not at all! Society needs a Lady Elton; the world more strong men like yourself!

ELTON. Having such strong convictions as regards marriage, I wonder you remain single!

MARIA. Yes, why do you?

ARTHUR. Ah, that's my affair! Mrs. Cheyney is rather an attractive woman, if I dare say so, Elton?

ELTON. Forgive me, but perhaps it's because I am not modern, but I prefer the word likeable to attractive.

ARTHUR. Perhaps it's because I am too modern, but I differ! To accuse a beautiful woman of being liked by one is suggestive that her underclothes are made of linoleum.

(Everyone laughs except ELTON, who looks displeased and astonished.)

But to suggest that she is attractive betrays a meaning that, with encouragement, you have more and better things to say to her.

MARIA. Angel!

(WILLIE laughs.)

MRS. WYNTON *(to WILLIE)*. Do stop that silly noise!

(MRS. WYNTON gives MARY a cigarette, which she lights from her own matches.)

ELTON *(ignores ARTHUR)*. The concert seems to be quite a success!
(Goes above the sofa R., and over to the fireplace.)

(There is a little pause.)

MARY. Terribly good, isn't it?

ELTON. The tall lady who played the violin; is she a professional?

ARTHUR. She is—but not at violin playing.

(MRS. CHEYNEY enters, carrying a parasol, followed by MRS. EBLEY, by windows C. from L. MRS. CHEYNEY to R.C., MRS. EBLEY to L.C.)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Have you all had tea?

(ARTHUR rises and goes down L.)

MARIA *(rising)*. Of course! I insist on your sitting down and resting; you'll be worn out!

MRS. CHEYNEY *(coming down R.C. and putting MARIA into her seat again)*. Nonsense! Mrs. Ebley has been an angel; she's helped me to entertain all those dozens of people in the garden!

MRS. EBLEY *(coming down L.C.)*. Nonsense! I did nothing! This child, Maria, is a perfect marvel; you don't know how they adore her out there!

MARIA. Thank heaven we have something in common with them in here!

ARTHUR. A sentiment to which I heartily subscribe!

MRS. CHEYNEY *(curtseys)*. Thank you, my lord! Have you had some tea?

ARTHUR. I had a whisky and soda.

MRS. CHEYNEY. I've got some good news for you; one more item, then Lord Elton has promised to make a little speech—the collection—and after that you can all go home!

MARIA. You have been an angel to have taken all this trouble to-day!

(MRS. EBLEY sits on stool R. of the settee L.C.)

ELTON. Most kind! (*At fireplace R.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. It's kind of you all to have come; I'm afraid you have hated it!

MARIA (*taking MRS. CHEYNEY'S hand*). We adore you, my dear, and that makes it perfect!

MRS. EBLEY. I have made her promise to come to me on Friday week, when you all come!

MARIA. That's wonderful!

ARTHUR. I'll bring you!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Lord Elton has very kindly offered to drive me from London.

ARTHUR. Splendid! Then I'll get Elton to give me a lift in his car!

MARIA. And don't forget, young woman, I am giving a dinner for you on Tuesday!

ARTHUR. Tuesday? I'll remember.

MRS. CHEYNEY. I won't forget! You know, you're all too kind to me. I don't know why you are; I'm not the least amusing or modern; I don't drink; I don't smoke, and I don't swear—I'm really terribly dull!

JOAN. You're an angel, and I swear enough for both of us.

MRS. CHEYNEY. I'm terribly sorry; but I'm going to push you all back to that concert—we are being rather rude to the singers.

(*She takes MRS. EBLEY up to the window.*)

MARIA. Not nearly as rude as the singers have been to us.

(MRS. WYNTON rises, takes WILLIE with her up L. to windows.)

JOAN. If that fat woman plays the violin again I shall hiss her body off the stage.

(*Exeunt MRS. EBLEY, WILLIE and MRS. WYNTON, off R.*)

MARIA. My dear! She's a joke compared with the woman who sings like the bath water running away.

(ARTHUR sits R. of MARY.)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*coming down from the windows*). You must go, my dears!

(MRS. CHEYNEY and MARIA go up C. to the windows.)

MARIA. The moment Elton has made his little speech I'll go; so, in case I don't see you again, good-bye and don't forget you are dining with me on Tuesday.

MARY (*rising and going up L. to windows c.*). Give me a lift and I'll come with you.

MARIA. Certainly. Can I give you a lift, Elton?

ELTON. Many thanks, I have my own car.

MARIA. Thank God! I hope he always has it.

(*MARIA and MARY exeunt c. off R.*)

JOAN (*rising*). Are you going my way, Arthur?

ARTHUR. Which is your way?

JOAN. Grosvenor Square.

ARTHUR. Sorry; mine's the other way. Besides, I too have a car, and why not, indeed?

JOAN (*going up to MRS. CHEYNEY and shaking hands*). Good-bye, Mrs. Cheyney—I'm going to face that foul violin-player.

(*Exit off R.*)

ARTHUR (*rising and going to piano for his hat*). You poor dear, I'll come with you. Well, thank heaven, we have your speech to look forward to, Elton. (*Up to MRS. CHEYNEY at windows c.*) And, thank heaven, you have my speech to look forward to, young woman. (*He goes out c. to R.*)

ELTON. Can I give you some tea? (*Crossing from the fire above the settee L.C. to the tea table L.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*coming down c. from the windows and sitting on the R. end of the settee L.C.*). You don't like Lord Dilling?

ELTON. How did you know that? (*Pouring out tea.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Instinct! (*She places her parasol on the settee at her L.*)

ELTON. If you hadn't mentioned it, I should have said nothing, but as you have, I don't like him! (*Coming in front of the settee L.C. and handing her a cup of tea.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. He's very young.

ELTON (*going up L. to the table at back for plate of cakes*). All women make that excuse for him!

MRS. CHEYNEY. And a good many women who have known him made that excuse for themselves, I suppose?

(*ELTON returns and offers cakes L. of MRS. CHEYNEY.*)

No, thanks.

ELTON. Yes! (*He goes up again L. and puts plate down.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Odd creatures, women, aren't they?

ELTON (*he comes down and leans over the back of the settee to MRS. CHEYNEY'S L.*). Frankly, I have to confess I know very little about women!

MRS. CHEYNEY. So they tell me!

ELTON. May I ask what they tell you?

MRS. CHEYNEY. You don't like women! But I hope I am an exception! I should hate you not to like me.

ELTON. I do, very much.

MRS. CHEYNEY. I'm glad!

ELTON (*bending over the settee. Nervously*). And I only hope it is mutual!

MRS. CHEYNEY. It is! I like you very much!

ELTON. Thank you, I'm glad! By the way, my mother is writing you to-day with the hope that you will be able to come and stay with us for a little! I'm afraid it will be a little dull, but we would both be very grateful if you would come!

MRS. CHEYNEY. It's most kind of your mother, and I shall write and tell her so, and how pleased I will be to come!

ELTON. I'm pleased, very pleased!

MRS. CHEYNEY. I shall see you again before we meet at Mrs. Ebley's?

ELTON. I trust so!

MRS. CHEYNEY. I suppose it's a very lovely house.

ELTON. Do you know, I've never been there!

MRS. CHEYNEY. You are going that week-end?

ELTON. Yes, if you are going.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Don't you like them?

ELTON (*choosing his words*). Oh, yes, very much—but—er—we live in rather a different world. Quite frankly, I don't understand these sort of people, and at my age it would be ridiculous to start and try.

MRS. CHEYNEY. A young man of your age should start to try almost anything.

ELTON. It's very kind of you to say so, but I fear not.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Nonsense! I'm an optimist.

(CHARLES *enters C. from R.*)

CHARLES (*coming down R.C.*). Lord Dilling has asked me, my lord, to tell you the audience are eagerly awaiting your speech, and also, my lord, he is the most eager of them all!

ELTON. Thank you!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Shall we go?

(MRS. CHEYNEY *rises picking up her parasol and, turning on her R., goes up C. giving her cup to CHARLES with left hand as she passes him. CHARLES places the cup on the table R.C.*)

ELTON. Please! (*Takes his hat from piano as he goes up behind Mrs. Cheyney.*)

(*Exeunt Mrs. Cheyney and Elton by window up C. and off R.*)

(*CHARLES smiles, and walks to bell down R. WILLIAM enters, followed by GEORGE at door L. WILLIAM commences to clear up tea things*

at table L. and pack them on to the tray. GEORGE is making as if to go into the garden, via the window C. CHARLES stops him, snapping his fingers. CHARLES, after ringing the bell, is between fireplace and the settee.)

GEORGE (stopping up C.). Can't I go and hear that bloke speak?

CHARLES. There is so much dullness coming to you in your life that cannot be avoided, George, that I am not prepared to allow you to add what can! Clear these things! (He nods towards the table R.C. and arranges the cushions on the sofa R.)

GEORGE (coming to table R.). Right ho! I must say I'm surprised because I never thought I would, but I like the toffs!

(GEORGE takes up the two cups from the table R.C. and the other from the piano.)

CHARLES. They have qualities, George!

GEORGE (taking cups across to WILLIAM and putting them on his tray). I always 'eard them talked about as being stupid!

CHARLES (going above the sofa R. between the table R.C. and the piano, sets things right on the piano). All the climbers in the world who fail in their ambition to know them, apologize for themselves by describing them as stupid or decadent!

(WILLIAM has packed his tray and comes to behind the settee L.C., holding it.)

GEORGE (above the R. end of the settee L.C.). Our Member down our way, he says the most terrible things about them!

CHARLES. And I dare say he is right! But the day one of them invites him to dinner he'll even have a bath!

(CHARLES examines glasses on the tray on the table R.C.; he finds two which have been used and gives them to GEORGE, who puts them on WILLIAMS' tray.)

The snobbishness of the upper classes, George, is only excelled by the snobbishness of the middle and the lower!

(GEORGE opens the door L. for WILLIAM, who exits with tray.)

GEORGE. I wish I could be "Sir Georgic," I wouldn't 'alf come it over them down my way.

(ARTHUR enters C. from R.)

ARTHUR. Give me a whisky and soda, please!

CHARLES (at corner of table R.). Yes, my lord!

ARTHUR (to GEORGE). Here! (Taking a step towards GEORGE and giving him something.)

GEORGE (advancing and taking the money). What's this for, my lord?

ARTHUR. For you. (*With an inclination of his head towards CHARLES.*) I haven't the courage to give it to him!

GEORGE. Thank you, my lord!

(*GEORGE exits L., closing the door.*)

(*CHARLES is holding the whisky and soda. The two men look at each other.*)

ARTHUR (*behind settee L.C.*). I can't remember! (*Smiles.*) Can you? (*He drops his hat on to the settee.*)

CHARLES. What, my lord?

ARTHUR. Where we have met.

CHARLES. We have never met, my lord!

ARTHUR. I assure you we have! (*Looks at him.*) I was educated—I mean, I was at Oxford!

CHARLES (C.). I once passed through Oxford in the train, my lord!

ARTHUR. Your manner suggests to me you might have got out and stayed there for a few years!

CHARLES. I had no idea Oxford had a school for butlers, my lord!

ARTHUR. Hadn't you? Tell me, how long have you been with Mrs. Cheyney?

CHARLES. Mrs. Cheyney engaged me six months ago next Tuesday in a registry office, in an adjoining street near Brook Street, to be her butler, my lord!

ARTHUR. Many thanks for the details! So you were not with Mrs. Cheyney in Australia?

CHARLES. Has Mrs. Cheyney ever been to Australia, my lord?

ARTHUR. Didn't you know Mrs. Cheyney came from Australia?

CHARLES. How should I, my lord? Mrs. Cheyney would never think of discussing her affairs with servants!

ARTHUR (*a little angry, smiles*). I accept the rebuke! (*Takes the glass from CHARLES.*)

CHARLES. There was none meant, my lord! (*He turns to the top of table R.C.*)

(*MRS. CHEYNEY enters C. from R.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Hello! I thought you had gone!

ARTHUR (*behind settee L.C.*). Why?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*up C.*). All the others have!

ARTHUR. I'm waiting for my man with my car!

CHARLES (*by table R.C., bowing and indicating outside windows R.*). Your man has been waiting for some time, my lord!

ARTHUR. Has he? Well, it's a lovely afternoon, tell him to wait a little longer!

CHARLES. Yes, my lord! (*He bows and goes up C., R. of MRS. CHEYNEY, and exits by windows and off to R.*)

ARTHUR. I like that fellow! (*He goes round the L. of the settee, takes up his hat and crossing to R. goes up R. of the sofa R. to the piano, and puts his hat down.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*a little L. of C., up stage*). You mean my butler?

ARTHUR. Yes!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Why do you like him?

ARTHUR. I like his insolence! (*He comes down to between the sofa and fireplace R.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. He was rude to you?

ARTHUR (*going up to piano*). The reverse. I have often been told to go to hell, but never so pleasantly as he told me to, a moment ago!

MRS. CHEYNEY. I shall dismiss him for that!

ARTHUR. Please, I ask you not to!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*coming down C. to stool below the table R.C.*). I shall! (*Smiles.*) He should have known you had already gone!

ARTHUR (*standing in front of fireplace*). But I haven't! Who told you I had?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*sitting on the stool*). Some of the women who went part of the way with you!

ARTHUR (*laughs*). I'd go the whole way for a woman who said a thing like that!

MRS. CHEYNEY. What a pity it is, then, that I've chosen the other direction!

ARTHUR (*down a little*). With Elton as your companion?

MRS. CHEYNEY. At all events, he would know the way.

ARTHUR (*laughing*). He would! I want to ask you something. When you were in London staying at the Ritz last week I rang you up five times, and each time I was told you were out!

MRS. CHEYNEY. What a shame!

ARTHUR. Were you out?

MRS. CHEYNEY. No! Each time I was in!

ARTHUR. I thought so!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Twice I answered it myself and told you I was out!

ARTHUR. May I ask why? (*He kneels on the sofa at its lower end.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Certainly! I don't care to be alone with you even on the telephone!

ARTHUR. Why not?

MRS. CHEYNEY. It's my only way of paying tribute to your reputation!

ARTHUR. Thank goodness! (*Reaching over the sofa, he puts his glass on the table at the back of it.*) For a moment, I thought you were going to embarrass me by saying you were nervous of me!

MRS. CHEYNEY. My dear Lord Dilling—if I allow you to call me Fay, may I call you Arthur?

ARTHUR. I have always wanted you to, Fay!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Thank you, Arthur!

ARTHUR. You were saying something?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Oh yes! You have the great distinction, Arthur dear, of being one of the few men in the world I am not nervous of, and I feel I ought to be.

ARTHUR. Modestly, may I ask why?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Well! You're not bad looking, exquisitely indifferent, even rude to people, a great sense of humour, brilliant—and—

ARTHUR. What else?

MRS. CHEYNEY. That's the trouble! Nothing else!

ARTHUR. I am what is commonly termed—one of those who don't attract you?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Isn't it odd?

ARTHUR. It's disappointing!

MRS. CHEYNEY. I feel that, too!

ARTHUR. Tell me, did you learn the art of rebuking people so charmingly from your butler, or did he learn it from you?

(From this point the dialogue is a little more heated.)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Neither! I expect Charles feels the same as I do—if there are to be insults, let us get them in first!

ARTHUR. I wonder if you would tell me what you mean by that?
(He sits on the settee.)

MRS. CHEYNEY. I want to very much! During the short time you have known me, Arthur dear, you have made me practically every proposal that a man can make a woman with the exception of one—marriage!

ARTHUR. I am not aware that I have ever made a suggestion to you that could not be spoken from any pulpit in any church! This is all pure imagination on your part!

MRS. CHEYNEY *(rising)*. How disappointing! *(She moves to L.C., standing with her back to the audience.)*

ARTHUR. What do you mean?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I mean, I hate you to use the stock remark of all men when they fail with a woman!

ARTHUR. You're quite wrong, but I see your point, because I suppose if a woman comes from Australia to England with the deliberate intention of marrying a—

MRS. CHEYNEY *(going up c.)*. Arthur dear, ring the bell, will you?

ARTHUR *(rising, is about to ring the bell)*. What for?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Charles knows where your hat is!

ARTHUR *(going up R. above the top of the sofa and the piano to Mrs. Cheyney's R.)*. I didn't intend to be rude, I—

MRS. CHEYNEY. You weren't rude, I assure you; you were only just a little feminine!

(They are together up c.)

ARTHUR *(embarrassed)*. Feminine! Really! Well, I—

(Turns to the table R.C., picks up his glass and drinks.)

MRS. CHEYNEY. You don't drink alcohol with your meals, do you?

ARTHUR. I do. Why do you ask?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Because you drink so much between them!

ARTHUR *(angrily)*. Do I? *(Puts his glass down.)*

(MRS. CHEYNEY laughs and he faces her.)

May I ask what there is to laugh at?

MRS. CHEYNEY *(sitting on stool R. of settee L.C.)*. Because I'm enjoying myself so much! It's so amusing to have put you once in the position of embarrassment that you must have so often succeeded with women by putting them in!

ARTHUR. If I may say so, you appear to have rather a low opinion of me!

MRS. CHEYNEY. It would be more civil of me to put it another way—I haven't a very high one of you!

ARTHUR. Really?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Have you of yourself!

ARTHUR. Not at the moment!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Then there's hope.

ARTHUR. Thank you! I suppose you would despise me even more if I were to finish that? *(Indicates the whisky.)*

MRS. CHEYNEY. Not at all! I should like you more if you didn't, that is all!

ARTHUR. I should hate you not to like me! Perhaps there is something else I could do for you?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Heaps!

ARTHUR *(R.C.)*. As, for instance?

MRS. CHEYNEY. One: live up to the reputation you have for possessing a sense of humour!

(Commence to check lights, see Light Plot.)

ARTHUR. Ah! Ah! Ah! Anything else?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Stop living on the glory of your ancestors!

ARTHUR. What do you mean by that?

MRS. CHEYNEY. What I say, Arthur dear!

ARTHUR. I am not aware that I do!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Then I'm wrong, and I'm sorry—but you might tell me one thing you do that proves I am!

(He looks at her: there is a pause.)

Don't hurry. I am not dining until half-past eight!

ARTHUR. Why should I tell you?

MRS. CHEYNEY. No reason at all! I'm only suggesting you should contradict what other people tell me!

ARTHUR (*coming a little to her*). And what do you suppose gives you the right to ask me questions like this?

MRS. CHEYNEY. The same right that has entitled you to ask me some of the questions you have! But as you can't answer, I'll answer for you! You've done nothing! Your epitaph at this moment is only this: "He was a good fellow; metaphorically he lived on the dole; his only success was women!"

ARTHUR. I resent very much being talked to in this manner!

MRS. CHEYNEY. One always hates a thing one is not used to!

ARTHUR. And you have no right to!

MRS. CHEYNEY. No, really! I resent equally as much being treated by you as a——

ARTHUR. What?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*waves her hand*). Well, there are various names for that particular type of woman; when I have never given you the slightest encouragement which would give you the right to. (*She rises and goes up c. to the windows. A pause.*) You must see my point, Arthur dear.

(ARTHUR *moves up to between the table and the piano.*)

ARTHUR. If anything I have done suggested that—yes!

(*A' pause.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*coming down to behind the l. end of the settee l.c., leaning over it*). Will you be an angel and tell me exactly what was in your mind to say to me when you came back here after the others had gone?

(ARTHUR *looks at her.*)

Go on, pretend you're in a hunting field, and you have to be a sportsman!

ARTHUR (*leaning on the piano. Laughs*). I follow!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Go on!

ARTHUR. Very well. I meant to tell you, you were the most attractive woman I have ever known!

MRS. CHEYNEY. We are about to take another fence! Was I?

ARTHUR. I hadn't considered whether you were or not!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Splendid! Then?

ARTHUR. If that went well, I proposed to suggest a little dinner in my flat!

MRS. CHEYNEY. And if that went well?

ARTHUR. Then I am experienced enough not to have said another word till after the dessert!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Oh! (*She laughs.*) What was it your friends—divine! And now?

ARTHUR. I realize I had no right to, I was wrong. I beg your pardon; and in future I should never dream of asking you to dine with me without a couple of bishops. (*Coming to R. of MRS. CHEYNEY behind the settee.*) You didn't mean all those things you said to me just now?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I like you so much, every one!

ARTHUR. Am I really as bad as that?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Really!

ARTHUR. Good God! I may be a teetotaller to-morrow, but I feel I shall be very drunk to-night!

MRS. CHEYNEY. But why?

ARTHUR. You've depressed me! I don't feel I'm half the hell of a feller I thought I was, and it's a bore!

MRS. CHEYNEY. You are a hell of a feller, if you only knew it!

ARTHUR (*moving away to the table R.C.*). I don't propose to agree with anything you say—I am not!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Have a whisky and soda?

ARTHUR. Thank you, I don't drink! (*He turns up to the piano, and puts out his cigarette on the ash-tray.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*turning to him*). Angry with me?

ARTHUR. I'm something with you, but I don't know what it is! (*Comes to up C.*) My lords, I rise with certain diffidence not in support of the motion before the House, but——

MRS. CHEYNEY. What are you talking about?

ARTHUR. I feel I ought to be in the House of Lords speaking on behalf of some one who is down and out, or something or other!

MRS. CHEYNEY. May I come and hear you, the day you do?

ARTHUR. I would insist. In my peroration, I will point to you and say, "There is the good woman that pointed the way!"

MRS. CHEYNEY. It almost makes one resolve to be a good woman!

ARTHUR. Resolve? Aren't you a good woman?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Not very!

ARTHUR (*coming to her, behind the settee*). Well, what the devil do you mean by talking to me as you have to-night?

MRS. CHEYNEY. There is more than one way of not being a good woman, Arthur dear!

ARTHUR. There is more than—explain that!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Don't be so absurdly serious; besides, it would take too long! Look at the time!

ARTHUR. But——

MRS. CHEYNEY. I am dining at half-past eight!

ARTHUR. I insist on knowing whether you are a good woman or not!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Why do you want to know?

ARTHUR. Because I should feel such a fool if you weren't!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*putting out her hand*). I am!

ARTHUR. Thank God!

(ARTHUR *takes her hand, is going to kiss it, changes his mind and takes the hem of her dress and kisses it.*)

There! Could anything be more respectable than that?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Nothing!

ARTHUR (*going over to piano and getting his hat*). And, in addition, it's the one thing in my life I have never done before!

(ARTHUR *moves up to the windows c.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*laughing*). Mrs. Wynton has asked me to lunch with her to-morrow!

ARTHUR. She hasn't asked me, but I shall be there, nevertheless!

(*He exits by the windows c. and off to B.*)

(MRS. CHEYNEY *goes up stage a little and watches him going out, shrugs her shoulders, and then goes to the table B.C. and picks up a cigarette, lights it, and throws it down.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Damn! (*Takes up ARTHUR's glass; smells the whisky, pulls a face and puts it down, gazing into space, evidently thinking and her mind distracted, turns to the piano and commences to play.*)

(MRS. CHEYNEY *plays an excerpt from "Scriabine" Op. No. 9, Nocturne II, for the left hand.*)

(WILLIAM *enters door L. He closes the door and switches on the lights at switch below the door L.*)

(*See Light Plot.*)

(*He then goes up to the windows c., looks out, closes all the windows, fastens them and draws the curtains. Coming down c., he takes a packet of cigarettes from his trousers pocket and lights his cigarette from matches he finds in his pocket. He sits B. of the settee L.C., takes a paper from his pocket and reads. GEORGE enters door L., closing it after him; he carries the "Evening News," opened at a crossword puzzle. He comes down c., dances over to L. in front of WILLIAM and sits on the table L.*)

(JIM *enters L., closes the door. He is a chauffeur and in his uniform, carrying his hat. He comes c., looks round and decides to sit on settee L.C., left of WILLIAM.*)

(CHARLES *enters from L. He closes the door. He is smoking a cigar and he gets c. and takes a look at them all. Goes up to windows, looks outside through the curtains and stands behind MRS. CHEYNEY by piano stool.*)

CHARLES. Charming! Charming! Scriabine. (*He goes down R. and sits on the sofa.*)

JIM. Scriber—what?

WILLIAM. Bean.

JIM (*to* MRS. CHEYNEY). Play us that tune, "I want to be 'appy!"

(*MRS. CHEYNEY stops playing and looks at them all.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*starting to play something else*). What a pretty lot of pets you look, don't you?

CHARLES. Thank you, darling!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Well! (*Plays a scale on the piano, rises, comes down c.*) I've got the invitation.

CHARLES. When?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I am asked to stay with Mrs. Ebley as an honoured guest on Friday week!

JIM. Great!

CHARLES. Wonderful! The pearls she was wearing this afternoon struck me as being worth, say, as a venture, twenty thousand!

JIM. Here! I hope she has got better ones than that at home!

CHARLES. Much!

WILLIAM. Then if we bring this off there isn't any reason why we shouldn't retire, should we be so inclined!

CHARLES. None! It will put us in the happy position of only doing the things, and those, we want to!

JIM. Charlie, this was a great idea of yours!

CHARLES. Not too bad, if I may say so, old friend!

WILLIAM. Wonderful! You're a master, Charles!

JIM. It's great, that's what it is!

MRS. CHEYNEY. I should have added, I haven't definitely accepted the invitation.

(*They look at each other.*)

CHARLES. Why not?

WILLIAM. You ain't thinking of refusing it, are you?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I am!

(*There is a pause. They all look alarmed.*)

CHARLES. Jane, my dear, I—

MRS. CHEYNEY. I have changed it to Fay!

CHARLES. Fay! Delightful! I prefer it! May I ask why you are in doubt?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*standing c.*). Certainly! I happen to like all these people very much; and in consequence, at the moment I am finding it rather distasteful to take Mrs. Ebley's pearls from her! (*By the table behind the sofa B.C.*)

JIM. Oh, chuck all that!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*addressing CHARLES*). Very little of that (*pointing at JIM*), Charles dear, will decide me definitely not to do it!

CHARLES. Quite! I see Jane's—Fay's point perfectly!

MRS. CHEYNEY. The idea of persuading perfectly charming people into inviting you to their house for the purpose of robbing them isn't pleasing me at all!

JIM. Here! You have had none of these scruples before!

MRS. CHEYNEY. No! But during my adopted career I have never before come in contact with the people I have had to carry on my profession with, as it were!

CHARLES. No.

JIM (*standing up*). And you ain't going to do it?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I am in grave doubt, Jim darling! (*Goes up c. to window and looks out into the night.*)

JIM (*to CHARLES*). Here, can't you do anything?

CHARLES. I? What can I do?

JIM. Can't you tell her to stop behaving like a fool?

CHARLES. I can't,

(JIM resumes his seat.)

because I know so well how she feels! I remember on one occasion practically having got a pocket-book containing a large sum from the pocket of a client, when I heard him say something rather kind and attractive to the person he was with; it was very wrong of me; but, do you know, I was so touched, I put it back!

JIM. Oh, for God's sake, let us sing Hymn 225 and have done with it!

WILLIAM. So you've fallen for the swells, have you?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I suppose that describes it; they are charming, and I like them.

WILLIAM. Perhaps you have ideas of being Lady Elton?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I have a suspicion I will refuse that!

WILLIAM. Well, the other feller ain't a marrying sort, you know!

MRS. CHEYNEY. So he tells me! (*Coming down c.*)

CHARLES (*indifferently*). Do you like him, Fay?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Terribly! But don't be alarmed, I'm going to refuse him, too!

CHARLES. I'm relieved.

WILLIAM (*rising and going to MRS. CHEYNEY*). Do you mind telling me what we've been giving you lessons for every day this week?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I'm sorry; but I didn't quite realize, when I adopted this profession, that the people I would have to take things from would be quite so nice.

CHARLES. Quite!

WILLIAM. So we've spent months planning this, teaching her

all we know, dressed up as butlers, she pretending to be an Australian widow, and on the verge of the greatest coup that has ever been made, she turns sentimental and refuses to do it. (*Sits again on the settee L.C.*)

CHARLES. I have rather enjoyed it! I'm not trying to persuade you, my sweet, but there is this to be remembered: the pearls we want from Mrs. Ebley were taken by that lady, without a scruple, from the wives of the men who gave them to her!

MRS. CHEYNEY. I know that!

CHARLES. And if you got them, there is this to be said, you would be in a position to say farewell to your profession, should you care to.

MRS. CHEYNEY. That I have thought of, too. (*Sits on stool down R.C.*)

CHARLES. Quite! But you feel a little sentimental about it?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Yes!

CHARLES. That, I feel, is a little wrong! If that principle were generally adopted, the world would stop! For instance, supposing a woman went to a doctor without appendicitis, but with a hundred pounds, and he became sentimental and told her her appendix was as pure as the driven snow, how many honourable men would there be in the medical profesiosn, I ask you? Supposing a man went to a lawyer with a bad case, but the money to pay for a good one, and that lawyer became sentimental and told him the truth—he was sure to lose—how many honourable lawyers would there be in the world, I ask you?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I've no idea! I only know I'm sorry I took on this particular thing!

CHARLES. I feel for you, because I am on the side of all repentant people, but I have a leaning towards the wise ones who make certain their repentance is going to be spent in comfort—I would quote Mrs. Ebley as an instance!

MRS. CHEYNEY. That's true! (*Rising and going up c.*)

WILLIAM. "I don't want to do it!" I have never heard such damned nonsense in my life!

CHARLES (*rising*). Not at all. (*Winks at WILLIAM and goes up and leans on the piano.*) I am full of sympathy for her!

(MRS. CHEYNEY turns to the piano, sits and plays softly.)

MRS. CHEYNEY. And, after all, if she had been sentimental, she would have never taken the pearls herself, would she?

CHARLES. She certainly would not!

MRS. CHEYNEY. That's true! Jim, old dear, what was the name of that tune you wanted me to play?

JIM. "I want to be 'appy!"

MRS. CHEYNEY. So do I!

(MRS. CHEYNEY plays chorus of "I want to be happy." All the gang look at each other—they realize she has decided to steal the pearls—JIM, WILLIAM and GEORGE do "thumbs up"—GEORGE jumps down and commences a comic dance, working up L. to C. JIM rises and dances down L. MRS. CHEYNEY continues to play to forte as the chorus finishes.

(SLOW CURTAIN.)

(ORCHESTRA.—*Tacit* 14 bars, takes up chorus with piano on stage at 15th bar *pp.*, rising to *ff.* as Curtain falls.)

CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE 1

Room at MRS. EBLEY'S country house. Ten days later. For details, see illustration and plan.

The room is expensively furnished in good taste. A piano and settee in front of it at L. Doors up stage R. and L. French window C. Fireplace down R.

TIME.—After dinner on a warm summer evening. The French windows are open. Fire, electric brackets and lamps on piano and table up L.C. are lighted.

(MRS. EBLEY seated in an arm-chair above the fireplace at the right is doing needlework. MARY at the piano left, playing. JOAN is at the back a little R. of the piano, doing Jazz movements to the accompaniment of the piano. ARTHUR, MARIA, WILLIE, MRS. WYNTON are sitting round a card table C., playing Bridge. A rubber is almost over. ARTHUR, who is "dummy," is sitting on a stool below the card table, his back to the audience. MARIA is C. at the top of the table facing the audience. WILLIE is R. of the table, and MRS. WYNTON L. MARIA has a good hand; there are also good cards in "dummy." She has six tricks at her left; WILLIE two. Each player has five cards.)

(The orchestra plays one chorus of "Poor Little Rich Girl," which, at the rise of the CURTAIN, is taken up by the piano on stage, at the repeat, as the orchestra finishes.)

(MARY plays forte. ARTHUR rises; he is smoking a cigarette, and goes up R. of the table and stands watching the game between MARIA and WILLIE.)

MARIA. Girls, girls, must you make that noise? Please.

(MARY continues to play; JOAN goes over to ARTHUR; they commence to dance at the back. MARIA leads a card. MRS. WYNTON and WILLIE follow. MARIA collects up the trick.)

Arthur! Arthur!

(MARY stops playing. ARTHUR and JOAN continue to dance, singing "Ta-ra-ra-ra-ra" to the time of the tune.)



To face page 30



Oh, do stop that ta-ra-ra. It's impossible to play.

(*They stop dancing. JOAN goes over to MARY and sits against her on the piano stool. ARTHUR drops down R. of MARIA.*)

ARTHUR. Sorry, darling, sorry.

(*MARIA pauses a long time before playing her next card; she tries to have a look at MRS. WYNTON'S hand; who hides her cards. MARIA then deliberately drops her handkerchief at her right. WILLIE bends down to pick it up; as he does so MARIA takes a good look at his cards which he has in his right hand; he quickly hides his hand over his shoulder.*)

WILLIE (*handing MARIA the handkerchief*). Allow me.

MARIA. That's very civil of you, Willie.

WILLIE. Not at all. I just didn't want you to look over my hand.

MRS. WYNTON. Willie!

ARTHUR. Bravo, Willie!

MARIA. Am I to assume that you think I would cheat?

ARTHUR. You are to assume that I am sure you would cheat. If you remember, at the ninth hole this morning, you turned to my caddy and said, "Is Lord Dilling looking?" He said, "No, m'lady." Whereupon, you said, "Well, kick my ball on to the pritty."

MARIA. The boy's a liar! I told him to kick yours into the rough.

(*They play another round.*)

(*Playing.*) Give me that queen; the rest are mine.

WILLIE. Blast!

MARIA. Four honours in one hand, seventy-two.

WILLIE. Four honours in one hand, sixty-four.

(*MRS. WYNTON gathers the cards.*)

MARIA. And score above.

ARTHUR. And the date is September 3rd, 1925, but there is no reason to count that in.

MARIA. Shut up! I make four hundred and seventy-two at five shillings a hundred is twenty-five shillings.

WILLIE. At half-a-crown a hundred is twelve and six, and we carry it forward.

(*ARTHUR picks up the bridge marker.*)

JOAN (*rising and going up to windows c.*). What a divine night! How I would love to be out in that exquisite garden, being told by some one I was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen! (*Comes to L.C. by the upstage end of the settee.*)

(MRS. WYNTON gives the pack of cards to MARIA, who commences to patience.)

MARY (still at the piano). Who would you like to be told that by in particular ?

JOAN (at corner of piano L.C.). Shouldn't care a damn, darling, as long as it was a man and I was told it ! Doing anything for a few minutes, Arthur ?

ARTHUR (writing on scoring card up R.C.). I am ! But Willie isn't. (Sitting on the arm of MRS. EBLEY'S chair R. above fireplace.)

JOAN (going over to table). Come and make love to me in the garden, Willie ?

WILLIE. I'd rather sit here and smoke !

(MRS. WYNTON pushes her chair back and lights a cigarette.)

JOAN. Pig !

MARIA. Any signs of the young lovers ?

JOAN (goes up c.). Not a sign—not a sound !

MRS. WYNTON. And they have been out there at least half an hour.

MARIA. I'm so excited I can't bear it ; does this mean that Mrs. Cheyney comes back into this room the future Lady Elton ? (Bangs table.) Answer, some one !

(JOAN comes down and sits in chair L. of MARIA at card table.)

ARTHUR. Does it necessarily follow because two people stay out in a garden alone for half an hour that they should return engaged to be married ?

MARIA. No two people ever stayed alone in a beautiful garden on a beautiful night like this alone without (sniff) something happening, and as it is Elton, I say that it is marriage !

ARTHUR. I disagree ! Unless he has very much altered, I suggest he is describing to her in detail the History of England !

(He rises and comes to the card table and puts the score pad down, points out MARIA'S mistakes to WILLIE.)

(WILLIE makes noise of laughter.)

MARIA. If he is, I hope she tells him she is not that sort of woman and smacks his face !

MRS. EBLEY. I should have thought you knew more about the geography of gardens than Elton, Arthur !

ARTHUR. I suggested that to her, myself !

MRS. WYNTON. And what did she say ?

ARTHUR. She said I knew too much about them !

MARIA. Arthur darling, I'm going to ask you a question.

ARTHUR. Am I in love with Mrs. Cheyney ?

MARIA. How did you know ?

ARTHUR. Because it has been evident that you have been going to, ever since we arrived in this house two days ago!

MARY. And are you?

ARTHUR. As every one is expected to contribute something to a week-end party, my contribution is this: I think I am! (*He moves behind the card table towards the piano.*)

JOAN. You think you are! Oh, divine!

MARIA. To what extent?

ARTHUR. That I don't know, myself?

MARIA. Stuff and nonsense! What are the symptoms?

ARTHUR (*moving to the front of the settee by piano*). I have suddenly discovered a liking for little children. (*He sits on settee.*)

MARIA. That sounds like the real thing!

(*WILLIE laughs.*)

MRS. WYNTON. If you can't stop that noise, Willie, I will send you to bed! (*Turning to ARTHUR.*) Go on, Arthur!

ARTHUR. During the time I have known her, I have also discovered that in the past one has eaten too much; that one only needs a little food!

JOAN. Go on, darling!

ARTHUR. Sleep, I find, is not essential!

MARIA. The man is really in love—but this is marvellous!

MARY (*still sitting at the piano*). What else, Arthur?

ARTHUR. It's the first time in my life I have been seriously obsessed by any woman!

JOAN. Do you like it?

MARIA. Of course he likes it!

ARTHUR. I do, rather! You must admit it's generous of me to tell you all this, particularly as she may, at any moment, return into the room affianced to another!

MARIA. It's divine of you, and it's the first thrill I have had since that horrid man tried to be familiar with me in a railway carriage.

(*They all laugh.*)

MRS. EBLEY. Curious, how you have never been able to forget that!

MARIA. My dear, it was two years ago, and each day I grow older I feel the only literature I care for is railway time tables.

(*They all laugh.*)

MRS. WYNTON. Arthur dear, having admitted all this, I can't understand why you doubt that you are in love with her?

ARTHUR. She won't have anything to do with me; she prefers to me, what I have always considered the world's prize ass; it may be that I am piqued!

MARY (*rising and standing at R. corner of piano*). I wonder if she is doing it on purpose?

ARTHUR. What do you mean by that?

MARIA. She may be merely encouraging Elton to encourage you!

ARTHUR. If she is, then she isn't a bit what I think she is!

(MARY takes up a piece of music and is reading it.)

MARIA. Good lord, the man has got it so badly he thinks her different from any other woman!

ARTHUR. I do!

MARIA. It's an extraordinary thing, but when an old man or a bad man falls in love, God help them!

(ELTON, with MRS. CHEYNEY on his L. hand, enter from the garden by windows C. from R., coming through the R. hand window.)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*standing just inside the room at window*). Playing Bridge on a divine night like this! Shame!

(MRS. CHEYNEY comes down into room to card table R. of MARIA. ELTON goes to L.O. between card table and the piano. Pause.)

ARTHUR. To have gone out would have been sacrilege to your divine night!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Why?

ARTHUR. We all know each other too well.

MRS. CHEYNEY (*laughing*). Really?

ELTON (*to MRS. EBLEY*). Mrs. Cheyney has a very bad headache.

ARTHUR. Who shall blame her?

(All the others snigger and suppress ill-mannered laughter.)

ELTON. I have been trying to persuade her to take something for it!

MRS. EBLEY (*rising and going to the bell below the fireplace, putting her work in work-bag*). But, of course, there's some aspirin in my room.

MRS. CHEYNEY (*over to and above MRS. EBLEY, by chair in front of fireplace R.*). Please don't, it may pass off!

MRS. EBLEY. But, my dear, I—

MRS. CHEYNEY. Please! I get them so often that I'm trying to get rid of them without taking anything; but if it gets worse I'll come in to you for them, may I?

(ELTON, going behind MARY to extreme L. of the piano, takes up a paper and reads it.)

MRS. EBLEY. I insist that you do!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Thank you so much!

(MRS. EBLEY, coming to corner of card table below WILLIE, catches ARTHUR'S eye. He makes a sign to her to get the others out of the room.)

MRS. EBLEY. Well, I suggest an early bed—perhaps just another rubber.

(MRS. EBLEY goes up above table and stands R. of MARIA. ARTHUR signs “No more. Get them all into another room.”)

(To MARIA quietly.) Say “It’s hot.”

MARIA. What?

MRS. EBLEY. Hot.

ARTHUR (on settee). H-O-T.

MARIA. What’s hot?

MRS. EBLEY. The room.

MARIA. But it isn’t—it’s beautifully cool.

MRS. EBLEY. Maria, be bright.

(MRS. EBLEY nudges MARIA, who sees ARTHUR signing to her—she at last understands and rises.)

MARIA. Oh yes, of course. This room is insufferably hot. Can’t we go and play in the er—bathroom—er—I mean, the next room? (She turns up c.)

MRS. EBLEY (to MRS. CHEYNEY). You would rather not play, my dear?

MRS. CHEYNEY (R.). I won’t, if you don’t mind.

MARIA. You’ll play, Arthur?

ARTHUR. I’ve got a headache, too.

MRS. EBLEY. Well, come along! Come along, everybody—come along, Willie. (She moves up R.)

(MRS. WYNTON rises and sits on the arm of the settee above ARTHUR.)

(WILLIE rises. Exit MRS. EBLEY, followed by WILLIE, at door up R.)

(JOAN moves to C. chair at card table vacated by MARIA, and commences to play Patience.)

MARIA (up c. to MARY at piano). Mary—Mary dear, we shall want you.

MARY (puts down her music and says). Oh, sorry.

(MARY crosses MARIA and exits door up R.)

MARIA (going down R. of table R.C.). We’ve got six already, but it can’t be helped. (Going up c.) Kitty, Kitty dear.

(MRS. WYNTON rises from arm of settee by ARTHUR, crosses above the card table in front of MARIA to her R. MARIA whispers in her ear, indicating MRS. CHEYNEY and ELTON. MRS. CHEYNEY is standing warming her feet at the fire, facing down stage. ELTON is absorbed in an evening paper at the piano L.)

What do you think ?

MRS. WYNTON. Not a notion !

MARIA. I'm doubtful. Arthur, do come and play.

(MRS. WYNTON *exits door R.*)

ARTHUR. I'm sorry—I can't—I'm in terrible pain.

MARIA. Elton, will you kindly make us up ?

ELTON. Certainly, if you want me to.

(ELTON *puts down the paper, and crosses below MARIA to chair above fire as MRS. CHEYNEY turns.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*turning to ELTON as he is crossing to door*). If you leave the door open, and you would like me to, I'll play to you !

ELTON. Thank you very much—that would be delightful !

(*Exit ELTON door R. MARIA pulls a face at ARTHUR and exits, following ELTON R.*)

(MRS. CHEYNEY *goes behind card table to L. and sits at the piano. JOAN remains at the table, playing Patience; she doesn't notice the others go. ARTHUR coughs; she takes no notice; he rises, goes below card table to R. He stands R. of JOAN R.C.*)

ARTHUR (*to JOAN*). You are wanted on the telephone !

(MRS. CHEYNEY *commences to play.*)

(*Piano off.*)

JOAN (*eagerly*). I am ! Who wants—— ?

(ARTHUR *puts his cigarette out on the ash-tray on the card table.*)

Oh, damn funny, aren't you ? (*Looks at him, then rises.*)

(*She exits door R.*)

ARTHUR (*behind card table*). Engaged ?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*sweetly*). Talking to me ?

ARTHUR. I don't see anybody else !

MRS. CHEYNEY. Sorry ! I didn't quite catch what you said.

ARTHUR (*coming a little to her*). I asked if you were engaged ?

(*She stops playing.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Tell me all that you have been doing since dinner ? (*Resumes playing the same piece.*)

ARTHUR. Explaining my symptoms.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Aren't you well ?

ARTHUR. No ! Are you sorry ?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Terribly ! What's the matter with you ?

ARTHUR. Loss of appetite—loss of sleep !

MRS. CHEYNEY. You should take something for it.

ARTHUR. I agree; but you give me no encouragement.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Any particular thing you would like me to play you?

ARTHUR. No!

(She stops playing. ARTHUR walks up to the left window.)

MRS. CHEYNEY. You have no idea what a perfect night it is out there! *(She plays.)*

(Piano off, "Au Claire de la Lune.")

ARTHUR *(up c.)*. Let us go out and see if you exaggerate.

MRS. CHEYNEY. I have such a headache!

ARTHUR. Isn't piano playing rather bad for it?

MRS. CHEYNEY. The reverse; it soothes it!

ARTHUR. And Elton?

MRS. CHEYNEY. What do you mean by that?

ARTHUR *(coming down c. to card table)*. If you are playing the piano, it's obvious to him that you are doing nothing else!

MRS. CHEYNEY *(smiles)*. That's clever of you.

ARTHUR. I'm terribly well up in all these things!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Amuse me by telling me some of your past!

ARTHUR. Each of my pasts only convinced me that there might be a wonderful future!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Too deep.

ARTHUR *(coming nearer to her at the R. corner of the piano)*. I realized how marvellous it would all be if I had loved them!

MRS. CHEYNEY. But you told them you did!

ARTHUR. I have some regard for good manners!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Quite!

(ARTHUR bends over the piano and pushes her hands off the keys.)

(Piano stops.)

ARTHUR. Did you accept Elton?

MRS. CHEYNEY. What makes you think I had the opportunity to?

ARTHUR. Did you refuse him?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I did not.

ARTHUR *(moving to the R. of c. chair behind card table)*. You asked for time to think it over?

MRS. CHEYNEY. You know so much, tell me a little more.

ARTHUR. In the end you will refuse him!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Why?

ARTHUR *(returning to L.C. between the table and the piano)*. That man's wealth and position can never compensate you for all his—stupidity and blah— *(Makes a grimace in imitation of ELTON.)*

MRS. CHEYNEY. I disagree! *(Rising from the piano stool and*

coming down stage L.C. to the stool below the table c.) Assuming all this is correct, the love of a good man stands for something.

ARTHUR. Not at all! That is proved by the fact that it is always a bad man who is the co-respondent.

MRS. CHEYNEY (*laughing*). Tell me why you are so interested in my marrying Lord Elton? (*She sits on the middle of the stool below the table.*)

ARTHUR (*coming to her l.*). Obvious! I am in love with you myself!

MRS. CHEYNEY. From anyone else that would suggest a proposal of marriage.

ARTHUR. If you like!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Don't look like that, Arthur, otherwise I'll believe you.

ARTHUR. You can!

MRS. CHEYNEY. You seriously mean to tell me you want to marry me?

ARTHUR. I wouldn't say that!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Ho!

(They both laugh.)

ARTHUR. Don't misunderstand! To me, the idea of marriage has always been the death and burial of all romance in one's life! And God knows I have done all I can to persuade you that that is so, but you don't agree! Very well, as I like you so much—

MRS. CHEYNEY (*correcting*). As I attract you so much!

ARTHUR (*putting his right foot on the L. end of the stool*). If you like! I am prepared to be at any church you like to name at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning!

MRS. CHEYNEY. I must attract you very much, Arthur!

ARTHUR (*bending to her*). More than I care to acknowledge, even to myself! For the first time, I don't understand myself; I'm unhappy when I'm not with you; I'm unhappy when I am! I can see nothing but you when you are present, and nothing but you when you are not; your voice is the only one I ever hear; in fact, let us face it, I've got it worse than any of God's creatures have ever had it before!

(Pause.)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*putting her left hand on his knee*). There are three reasons why I should like to marry you, Arthur!

ARTHUR. Being?

MRS. CHEYNEY. One, I like you terribly!

ARTHUR. Are the other two important? (*He takes her hand.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Two! it would be such fun to go to tea with all the women you haven't married!

ARTHUR (*throwing her hand playfully away from him*). Oh, shut up! (*He removes his foot from the stool.*) And the third?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I should be some sort of widow again within a year!

ARTHUR. There's always a chance of that, but I think it is worth it!

(MRS. CHEYNEY *shakes her head.*)

You don't agree. Why?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I know too much about you, and you know too little about me.

ARTHUR. Is there anything more to know about you than I do?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*rising and going a little to her R.*). Three volumes closely printed!

ARTHUR (*looks at her*). I'd give a great deal to understand what there is I don't understand about you, Fay.

MRS. CHEYNEY. It might amuse you. (*She turns up R.C. to the top R. corner of the table.*)

ARTHUR. Might it?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I hope so!

ARTHUR. I see! (*He moves a step to his L., turning to face her.*) I take it, my first and only offer of marriage is rejected?

(*She nods her head.*)

Have you been laughing at me, by any chance?

MRS. CHEYNEY. What makes you think so?

ARTHUR. I don't know; you look so strange! By God, I should be angry if you were! Are you laughing at me?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*sitting in the chair C. above the table*). The reverse; it's the first time in my life I remember not laughing at myself.

ARTHUR. What do you mean by that?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Just that.

ARTHUR. You're an odd creature!

MRS. CHEYNEY. I wish I weren't!

ARTHUR (*sitting in the lower chair L. of the card table*). There's some reason why you can't marry me?

MRS. CHEYNEY. No!

ARTHUR. You just don't like me?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I like being single!

ARTHUR. Can I ask you one other question?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Yes.

(*He leans forward and puts his hand out to her. She takes it.*)

ARTHUR. Are you all that I think of you, as a woman?

MRS. CHEYNEY. In what way do you think of me as a woman?

ARTHUR. All the things that a man demands from a woman he is going to marry.

MRS. CHEYNEY. I'm every one of the things you mean.

ARTHUR. I know you are! You're an angel.

(*They release each other's hands.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*rising*). I really have got a headache! (*Goes over to the fireplace R.*)

ARTHUR. I'm sorry! Why go into the garden in such thin shoes? Let me get you some aspirin! (*He rises and comes in front of the table to R.C.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. No, thanks! I think I'll go to bed! (*She turns up R.C. to the L. of the arm-chair above the fire.*)

ARTHUR (*going to her*). Fay, may I be allowed a platitude?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Yes?

ARTHUR (*humorously*). Perhaps in time?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*shakes her head*). No!

ARTHUR. Just friends?

MRS. CHEYNEY. That's right!

ARTHUR. I understand! (*He turns away from her and crosses above the table, and takes paper from the piano L.*) I think Centaur will win the big race on Tuesday!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Inglesby!

ARTHUR. Know anything?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Just an instinct!

ARTHUR. I'll back it! I believe in you! The only woman I ever have!

(*JOAN enters from the door R., shrieking with laughter, and goes up R.C. by the window.*)

The woman's in wine.

(*MARIA enters from door R.*)

MARIA (*going c. above the table*). Shut up, Joan! My advice to any man, woman or child who likes Bridge is, not to marry Elton! (*Goes up to L. window.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. What has he done?

MARIA (*turning, coming down c. to behind c. chair at card table*). Done? He's done every conceivable thing that doesn't appear in the book of rules. I'm afraid I was very rude to him. Oh dear! I'm always putting my foot in it! (*Goes up L.C.*)

JOAN (*coming down R. to MRS. CHEYNEY*). He's pompous even when he revokes. What a colossal ass he is!

MRS. CHEYNEY. I like him!

ARTHUR. Oh dear, oh dear!

JOAN. Sorry, darling! (*Puts out her hand to MRS. CHEYNEY.*)

ARTHUR (*at top end of piano L., reading the paper*). This young woman has a bad headache!

MRS. CHEYNEY. I have, rather! I'm going to bed! (*She crosses JOAN going behind the card table to the door up L.*)

MARIA (*moving to the door L. on MRS. CHEYNEY'S R.*). So am I, my dear! It's the only place I'm sure of not getting into trouble!

ARTHUR. Oh, come, come!

MARIA. I'll come with you!

(JOAN sits in the arm-chair R. above the fire.)

MRS. CHEYNEY (looks at ARTHUR). Good night!

ARTHUR. Good night, Fay dear! I'm going to back Inglesby!

MRS. CHEYNEY. It's a risk! (Opening door.) Good night, Lady Joan!

JOAN. Good night, darling, hope you will be all right in the morning!

(Exit MRS. CHEYNEY up L.)

MARIA. Good night, Arthur! Good night, Joan!

JOAN (in arm-chair at fireplace R.). Good night, darling; sleep well!

(Exit MARIA, closing door.)

Sorry she has a headache!

ARTHUR. Yes. (He puts down his paper on the piano with a sigh.)

JOAN! (Going to chair c. above the table.) Now, think before you speak. Supposing, only supposing—

(He puts out the chair R. of the card table, and taps it for JOAN to come and sit in it. He sits in the chair c. behind the table.)

I asked you to be my wife, what would you say?

JOAN (rising quickly and coming to the chair he has placed for her and sitting). I'll be ready in five minutes!

ARTHUR. What!

JOAN. Well, four.

ARTHUR. Good! Why?

JOAN. Heaps of reasons!

ARTHUR. I give it up! (Rises, starts to walk away above JOAN towards the door R.)

JOAN (turning round in her chair). Don't leave me; you're being so interesting; where are you going?

ARTHUR (turning to behind her chair). I'm about to resume my ordinary life! The whisky, I take it, is kept in the other room? Tell me something I can say that will annoy Elton!

JOAN. Tell him—tell him—I know, ask him which room Mrs. Cheyney is sleeping in?

ARTHUR. Excellent! (He is about to go R.)

JOAN. Hi! Come back and tell me how he died!

ARTHUR. I will! And I'll bring my whisky and soda and drink it here—(he kisses her on the head) you are more amusing!

(JOAN takes lipstick and powder from her little bag.)

(ARTHUR exits by door up R.)

(ROBERTS enters by door up L. He sees only JOAN. He is going up to c. windows at L. to look into the garden.)

JOAN. What is it, Roberts ?

ROBERTS (coming down to back of the table c.). Do you know where Mrs. Cheyney is, my lady ?

JOAN. Gone to bed. Who wants her ?

ROBERTS. A cable came for her this evening, and Charles, her butler, thinking it might be important, has brought it over, my lady !

JOAN. Is Charles out there ?

ROBERTS. Yes, my lady !

JOAN. Show him in !

ROBERTS. Yes, my lady !

(ROBERTS exits up L.)

(JOAN quickly applies lipstick and powder. ROBERTS shows CHARLES on, and goes out again closing the door.)

CHARLES (coming c. behind the table). Good evening, my lady !

JOAN (looks at him). Charles, I'm delighted !

CHARLES. You are, my lady ?

JOAN. Ever since I have known you, I have always said to myself : " Ah ! but what does he look like in ordinary clothes ? "

CHARLES. And, my lady ?

JOAN. I had no right to doubt you !

CHARLES. My late master, who left us some time ago, and of whose destination I am only suspicious, I am sure would be glad to hear how much you approve of the clothes that he left me, my lady, before he left us !

JOAN. I suppose clothes do make the man, Charles ?

CHARLES. Many a bride has been disappointed when they have taken them off, my lady !

JOAN (laughs). I never meet you, Charles, without something to say at dinner the next evening !

CHARLES. My mistress, I understand, has gone to bed, my lady ?

(ARTHUR appears in the garden up c. from R. with a glass of whisky. He is about to pass when, through the window, he sees CHARLES and stops ; quietly he stands back watching him the whole time.)

JOAN. Yes ! Do you want her particularly ?

CHARLES. No, my lady ! A cable came for her, and as I heard her say she expected an important one, I thought I had better bring it over ; I have also enclosed some letters that have come for her, in the parcel, my lady !

JOAN. I'll give it to her !

CHARLES (giving the parcel to JOAN). If you would be so kind, my lady ! Good night, my lady ! (Walks away towards door up L.)

(ARTHUR *drawing back, shows that he has recognized and remembered CHARLES.*)

JOAN (*speaking after CHARLES has got to the door up L.*). Good night, Charles!

CHARLES (*giving a look at her*). Good night, my lady!

(*He exits.*)

(*Pause. She looks at him going out, laughs. ARTHUR enters, comes down to L. of the card table, carrying in his hand a glass of whisky and soda.*)

ARTHUR. Well, I've come back to talk to you!

JOAN. Who do you think has been here since you left?

ARTHUR. Not a notion!

JOAN. My divine Charles!

ARTHUR. Charles? Charles who?

JOAN. Mrs. Cheyney's butler!

ARTHUR. No! Really? What did he want?

JOAN. Brought her some cables or something!

ARTHUR. I see!

JOAN. Arthur, I'm going to ask you a question; do clothes make the man? Because I've got a splendid answer!

ARTHUR. I don't know. Clothes can alter a man!

JOAN. How?

ARTHUR. I'll tell you. Some years ago, quite a number, there was a crook fellow living at the same hotel in Monte Carlo that I was; no one knew he was a crook, and we all liked him because he was rather amusing; one day he was, as it were, caught in the act; everybody started to chase him, and as I could run faster than the rest, it amused me to run in the opposite direction to my crook friend, with the result they all followed me and he got away!

JOAN. What has that got to do with clothes?

ARTHUR. Nothing; only, years later, he was dressed differently and I didn't recognize him!

JOAN. Which I call a damn dull story!

ARTHUR. Quite!

JOAN (*rising*). I'm going to bed; I'll take that up to Mrs. Cheyney on my way!

(*She is about to take the parcel when ARTHUR puts his hand on it across the table.*)

ARTHUR. No, go and talk to her for a minute, and I'll bring it up, which will give me a chance to say good night to her!

JOAN. You haven't half got it, dearie. (*She leans over the table and kisses ARTHUR.*) But I'm a sport; but don't be too long! (*Crosses behind the table to door up L.*)

ARTHUR. I won't!

(*She exits.*)

(*He looks at the parcel, examines it, appears very serious. He shakes it, turns it over in his hand, looks round to see if anyone is about and opens the parcel, which contains an empty 100-cigarette box. Turning it about to see what is inside, he sees written on the lid "Courage, my sweet!" He reads it aloud.*)

"Courage, my sweet!" (*He shakes his head and repeats it, then puts the box back in the parcel and closes it up. He whistles a tune.*)

(*MRS. EBLEY and ELTON enter by the R. window up C. from R.*)

ELTON (*on MRS. EBLEY'S L.*). Many thanks for a very pleasant evening! Good night!

(*Shaking hands.*)

MRS. EBLEY. Wouldn't you like something before you go to bed?

ELTON. No, many thanks! Good night!

(*MARY enters door R. and comes down R. to fireplace.*)

Good night, Dilling.

ARTHUR. Good night, Elton, and again good night!

(*ELTON exits door up L.*)

(*MRS. EBLEY sits at chair C. behind card table.*)

MARY (*sighing*). Ho! what a dull man!

(*MRS. WYNTON enters by door R.*)

MRS. WYNTON (*speaking behind her as she enters*). Willie, get me a glass of barley water! (*She comes to the R. of the card table and stands behind the chair.*) Arthur, were you really serious to-night when you told us you were really in love?

ARTHUR (*L. of the card table*). My dear! It was my odd way of being amusing!

MRS. EBLEY. I do wish you would marry, Arthur!

ARTHUR. I wanted to once!

MARY (*at fireplace R.*). Why didn't you?

ARTHUR. One; she refused me! Two; I have an idea she was everything I thought she wasn't!

MRS. WYNTON (*laughing*). How tragic!

MARY. Tell us about her!

ARTHUR. I have told you all that I know!

(*WILLIE WYNTON enters by the door up R. with a glass of barley water; he gives it to MRS. WYNTON and then goes to MARY: they talk at the fireplace.*)

MRS. WYNTON (*moving to R. of MRS. EBLEY*). I am going to bed!
(*She kisses MRS. EBLEY.*)

MRS. EBLEY. Don't forget. Breakfast at ten.

MRS. WYNTON (*turning on her way to the door up L.*). Oh! Can't I have mine in my bedroom?

MRS. EBLEY. Lazy girl—of course you may.

MRS. WYNTON. Well, good night, darling, and ever so many thanks for a perfect week-end! (*She is near the door.*)

MRS. EBLEY. So glad you have liked it, darling!

MRS. WYNTON. I have.

ARTHUR. Oh, Kitty! Give this to Mrs. Cheyney, would you, on your way up? Her butler brought it—you might tell her that.

(*He has taken up the parcel and turns up L.C. to MRS. WYNTON'S R.*)

MRS. WYNTON (*as she takes the parcel and is opening the door, sees WILLIE talking to MARY*). Willie!

WILLIE (*going at back of the table to ARTHUR'S R.*). Going to bed, Arthur?

ARTHUR. I? Not for years!

(*MRS. WYNTON goes out door up L. WILLIE moves in front of ARTHUR.*)

WILLIE (*turning to ARTHUR*). I'll come back and have a cigarette with you, (*in ARTHUR'S ear*) as soon as I can get away!

(*WILLIE follows MRS. WYNTON out door up L. ARTHUR comes down L. of the table.*)

ARTHUR (*to MARY as he moves 'across in front to R.C.*). Say good night to the pretty lady and hop it!

MARY. Are you talking to me?

ARTHUR. Yes, lovely!

MARY (*to MRS. EBLEY, going to her right, crossing above ARTHUR*). Do you mind being left alone with him?

(*ARTHUR goes to the fire, and stands with his back to it.*)

MRS. EBLEY. I'll take the risk.

MARY. Very well; good night, darling; and, by the way, you have got me until after lunch.

MRS. EBLEY. Splendid!

MARY (*crossing behind MRS. EBLEY, takes a book from table up L.C. and goes to the door L.*). Good night, Arthur!

ARTHUR. Good night.

(*She exits by door up L.*)

(*There is a pause.*)

MRS. EBLEY. What's the matter, Arthur? You look so worried!

ARTHUR. I? I'm not a bit; a little tired!

MRS. EBLEY. So am I!

ARTHUR. It's been a particularly happy week-end!

MRS. EBLEY. I have loved having you all.

ARTHUR. If I may say so, our little friend, Mrs. Cheyney, has considerably contributed to the pleasure of it.

MRS. EBLEY. I simply adore her; that is a sweet woman, Arthur.

ARTHUR. Very! By the way, where did Maria find her, do you know?

MRS. EBLEY. She met her first, I believe, at the tables at Cannes.

ARTHUR. Ha!

MRS. EBLEY. Then, by some accident, on the way home, they found they were staying at the same hotel in Paris, and Maria, with that love she has of finding new people, took her up, and showed her the sights, as it were!

ARTHUR. I envy her! That's a job I would have enjoyed!

MRS. EBLEY. I'm sure you would!

ARTHUR. By the way, was her butler, the immaculate Charles, with her at the time?

MRS. EBLEY. Fortunately he was, because Maria lost some valuable things and Charles was instrumental in getting some of the things she valued most returned to her.

ARTHUR. Did he, be George? That was decent of him. (*He goes up R.C. and over to the L. window behind MRS. EBLEY.*)

MRS. EBLEY. Mighty useful for Maria.

ARTHUR. What a divine night. (*He turns to MRS. EBLEY'S L. hand.*)

MRS. EBLEY. Yes, isn't it?

ARTHUR (*looking at MRS. EBLEY'S pearls, which he takes in his hands*). Those are pretty good, if I may say so, Sybil.

MRS. EBLEY. They are more than pretty good, if I may say so, Arthur.

ARTHUR. Insured?

MRS. EBLEY. To be vulgar, for fifty thousand.

ARTHUR. Where do you keep them at night?

MRS. EBLEY. Oh, I don't know. Alongside my bed.

ARTHUR. I'd like to sleep with fifty thousand pounds alongside my bed.

MRS. EBLEY. Don't be ridiculous!

ARTHUR (*putting his hands to his head*). Oh dear, oh dear!

MRS. EBLEY (*placing her hand on his arm sympathetically*). What's the matter, Arthur? You look terribly tired.

ARTHUR (*moving away on his L.*). So would you if you hadn't slept for three nights.

MRS. EBLEY. Not slept for three nights—why?

ARTHUR. Sybil, may I be a perfect pig? (*Facing MRS. EBLEY and sitting on the upper arm of the settee L.*)

MRS. EBLEY. Well!

ARTHUR. I hate that infernal room you've given me.

MRS. EBLEY. Why, what's the matter with it, Arthur?

ARTHUR. Well, the walls are covered with ivy and it's full of sparrows—I can't sleep a wink.

MRS. EBLEY (*rising*). Arthur, why didn't you tell me this before?

ARTHUR. Because I have a beautiful and unselfish nature.

MRS. EBLEY (*moving towards ARTHUR*). Rubbish!

ARTHUR. Why did you give Elton my room?

MRS. EBLEY. Well, he's never stayed here before, and it seemed only civil to give him that room.

ARTHUR. It seems a pity I should lose my life on account of Elton.

MRS. EBLEY. Oh, Arthur!

ARTHUR. Can't Roberts make me up a room somewhere else?

MRS. EBLEY. I'm afraid it's impossible. The house is full. Now, what can I do?

ARTHUR. Don't worry; it doesn't matter.

MRS. EBLEY. My dear, I shouldn't sleep a wink, knowing you weren't comfortable. I'm miserable. What can I do? (*She moves to the back of chair L. of table thinking.*)

ARTHUR. Nothing.

MRS. EBLEY (*turning to him, suddenly*). Arthur, would you like my room?

ARTHUR. Good heavens, no!

MRS. EBLEY (*above him, her hand on his shoulder*). Why not! It doesn't make the slightest difference where I sleep—I certainly shouldn't sleep a wink if I thought you weren't comfortable.

ARTHUR. I wouldn't dream of such a thing.

MRS. EBLEY. Don't be ridiculous, Arthur! (*With a friendly little shake of his shoulder.*) Besides, I've spoiled you ever since you were born; there's not much reason in my not going on with it.

ARTHUR. On your oath, you swear you don't mind?

MRS. EBLEY. Of course not. What difference does it make? I've often slept in that room. I'll get my maid to move your things, then you'll get a decent night's rest. (*She turns to the door up L.*)

ARTHUR. The difference between you and me is, that I'm a selfish swine and you're an angel.

MRS. EBLEY (*at the door*). Nonsense! You're nothing of the sort.

ARTHUR (*rising and going to the back of upper chair L. of the table*). Oh! and, Sybil, you might do something else for me.

MRS. EBLEY. What?

ARTHUR. If you see any of the others, don't mention it to them; they'd think me such a fool.

MRS. EBLEY. Of course not. And, Arthur, as you're not sleeping I'll have some hot milk sent up to your room.

ARTHUR (*moving to the back of the table*). No—I don't think I'll

risk that—but you might get Roberts to send me up some sandwiches and a pint of champagne.

MRS. EBLEY. Why, is champagne good for not sleeping?

ARTHUR. My dear, champagne is good for everything.

MRS. EBLEY. Oh, all right!

ARTHUR (*turning to her*). Oh! and, Sybil—

(MRS. EBLEY *comes a step back from the door, he advances and takes hold of the pearls.*)

look! Just for a lark, let me—er—er—no, don't bother; (*he drops the pearls and turns from her a little to his R.*) it doesn't matter; I'll come and kiss you good night on the way up.

MRS. EBLEY (*turning to the door again*). Well, don't be long—I shall be asleep in two winks—I don't mind the sparrows and the ivy. (*She exits and closes the door and immediately is heard speaking outside.*) Yes! I've loved having you, Willie.

(ARTHUR *moves to the R. upper corner of the table as WILLIE WYNTON enters by the door up L.*)

WILLIE (*as he closes the door*). Good! Glad you are here! (*Coming to L. of the table.*) Can I pour you out a whisky and soda?

ARTHUR. You can! A large one!

(WILLIE *crosses over in front and goes off by door R. to get whisky and soda. ARTHUR quickly turns up stage and looks round outside the windows; he returns to the L. upper corner of the card table as WILLIE enters with two glasses of whisky and soda and sits R. of table.*)

WILLIE. Been a devilish amusing week-end, Arthur!

ARTHUR. Devilish!

WILLIE. I've enjoyed it! (*Gives ARTHUR his drink.*) Great fun! Sorry it's over! What a darling that little Cheyney woman is!

ARTHUR. You like her?

WILLIE. Enormously! She has all the qualities men like in a woman!

ARTHUR. Quite! I often wonder what a feller does when, by accident, he finds out that a woman he admires hasn't any of the qualities he thought she had!

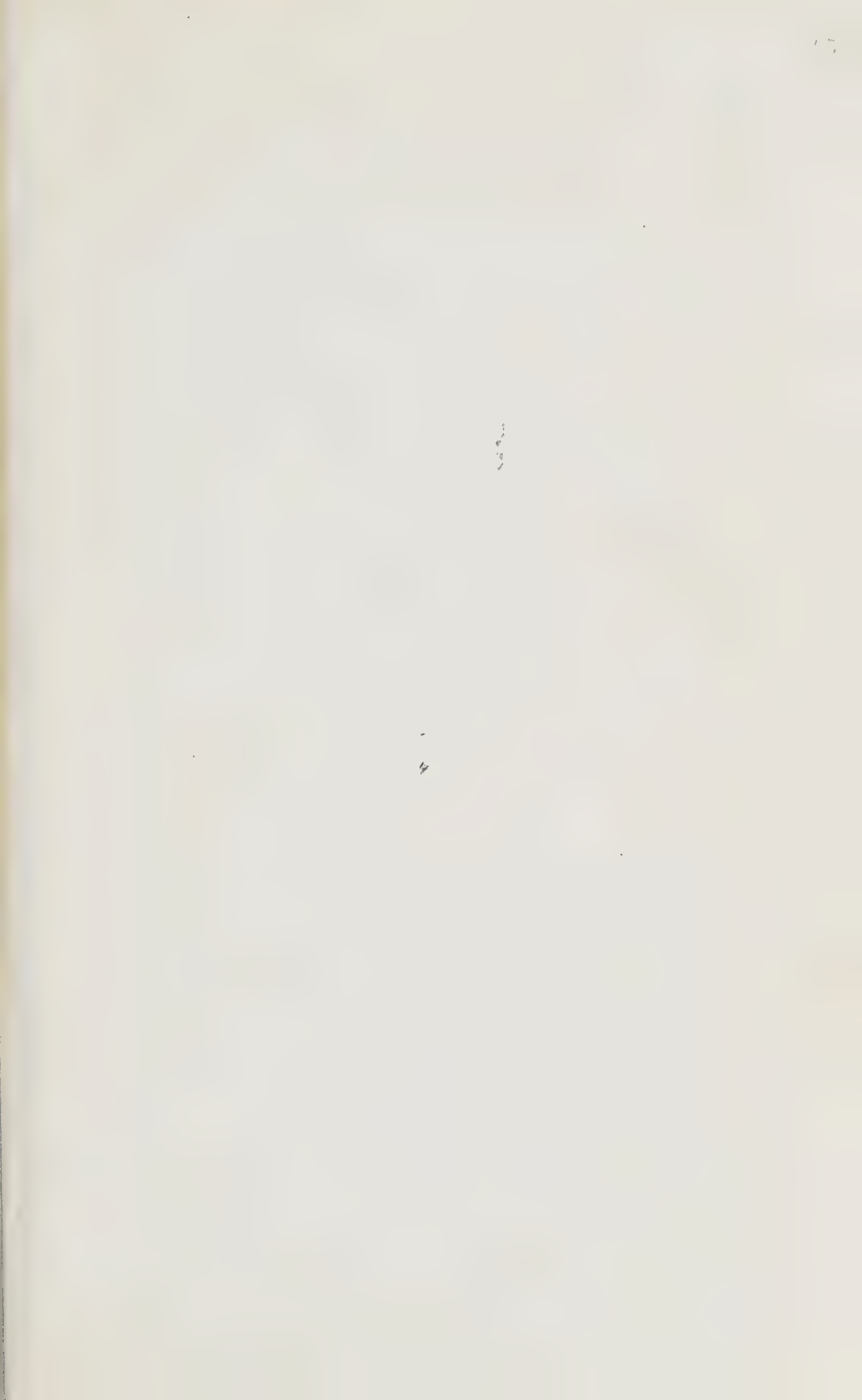
WILLIE. I don't know. I suppose he'd be a little disappointed, wouldn't he?

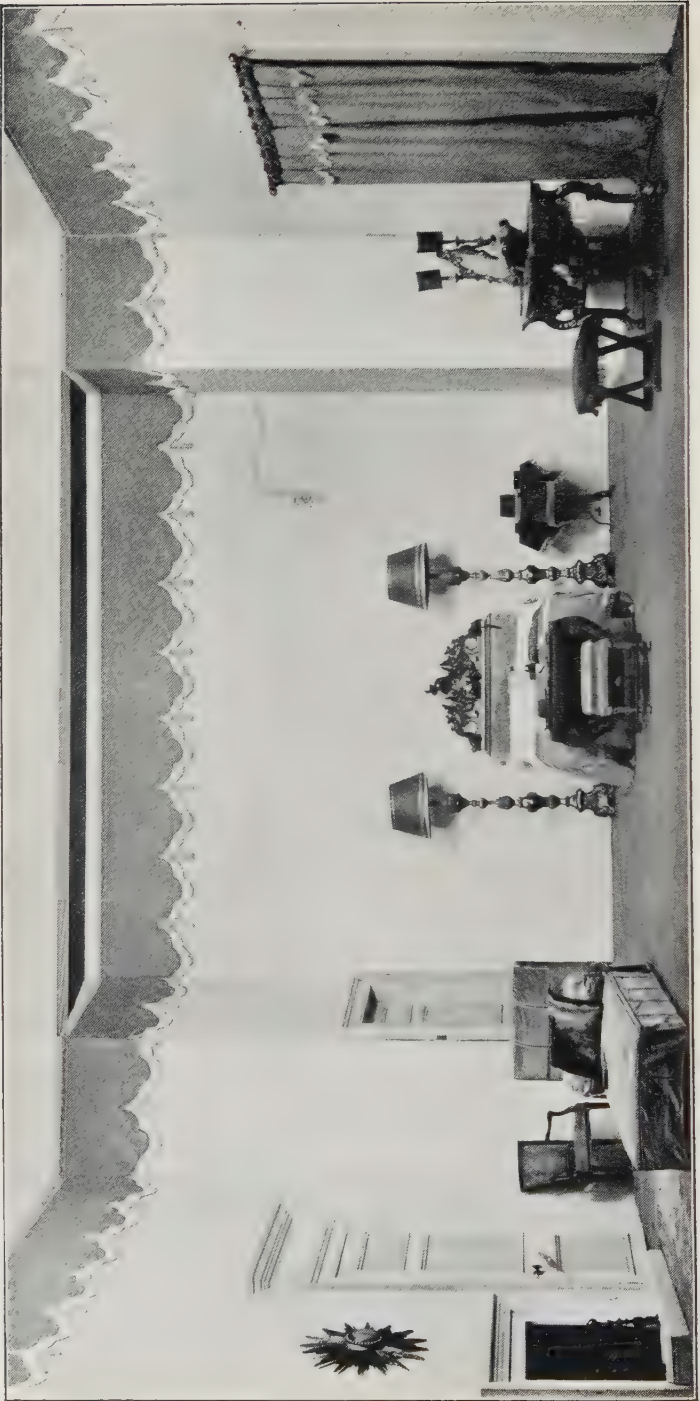
ARTHUR. Are you asking me?

WILLIE. Yes!

ARTHUR. Speaking for myself, I should be damned angry!

CURTAIN.





ACT II

SCENE 2

MRS. EBLEY'S Bedroom. See illustration and plan.

(ARTHUR is sitting on the R. side of the day-bed R., leaning back reading a book. He is wearing a dressing-jacket. The fire is lighted. After a moment the clock over the mantel strikes three. He continues reading for a few seconds, then puts down his book, rises, stretches himself and turning round opens the door above the fireplace a little and stands listening, then closes it again. He comes down in front of the fire and crosses over in front to the dressing-table L. and looks in the mirror. He examines his face rather critically, pulling down his lower eyelids and moving his head from side to side as he endeavours to get a good light on his eyes. He stands back a little to get a more general survey of his face. He takes off his wrist watch and going up stage puts it on the table L. of the bed. Turning to the bed he takes his pyjamas which are on the pillows and lays them out on the bed—turns the bed down, arranges the pillows, looks at and fingers the lace trimming. He is just about to take off his dressing-jacket when he hears a sound. He stands motionless for a moment looking over to the door R. above the fireplace. Then, quickly, he re-buttons his jacket and crosses on tiptoe to the door. Putting his ear to it, he listens. He goes up to the door of the dressing-room above on the R. and looks in, shuts the door again and is coming down to the lower door when he appears certain that he hears some one coming—he steps back quickly and switches off the lights by the switch at the dressing-room door. The flicker of the fire is just sufficient to show MRS. CHEYNEY opening the door above the fireplace. She does so very quietly and comes into the room. She whispers “Mrs. Ebley! Mrs. Ebley!” She comes down below the day-bed and crosses R.O. and up to the L. of the bed. She pauses there a moment and then goes slowly down to the dressing-table. As she approaches it ARTHUR switches on the lights, comes down to the door above the fire, locks it and puts the key in his pocket.)

ARTHUR (*smiling at her*). Do you know, I had a feeling that you would come.

MRS. CHEYNEY (*above the dressing-table L.*). What do you mean?

ARTHUR (*going to R. of the table below the bed*). Champagne! (*He points to the bottle on the table.*) And sandwiches! Could anyone, I ask you, be more thoughtful?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I—I—I—thought this was Mrs. Ebley's room, and I came to ask her for some aspirin for my head.

ARTHUR. As a host, I'm superb, really I am. I even thought to borrow that, too; here they are! (*Takes pearls out of his pocket, holds them up to her.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. I—I—don't know what you mean! Why are you in this room?

ARTHUR. As I have said, I had an idea you were coming in to it, and as I like you so much, I tricked Sybil into changing rooms with me.

MRS. CHEYNEY (*quickly crossing to the door R.*). Let me out of this room, do you hear?

ARTHUR. I will let you out when the penalty of coming into it has been paid.

MRS. CHEYNEY. What do you mean?

ARTHUR. What I say!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Unlock this door!

(*He smiles at her.*)

Do you hear? Unlock this door, or I will break it down!

ARTHUR. Well, why don't you?

(*She stares at him.*)

But if you want them to know who you really are, and, believe me, when they do they will have considerably less sympathy for you than I have, there is a night bell (*with a jerk of his head he indicates the bell-push at the R. of the bed-head*), ring it, and rouse the butler.

(*She turns from the door to the R. corner of the head of the day-bed.*)

Pause. They look at each other. ARTHUR is still at the R. end of the table below the bed.

I do hope you will believe me when I tell you I sympathize with you very much! (*He moves a little down L.C.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*moving to the R. of the table below the bed*). You mean, at being locked in a room with you alone?

ARTHUR (*turning*). On that, my inclinations are to congratulate you. I meant, you nearly made such fools of us all, it seems a pity not to have allowed you to complete it! (*Shows her the pearls; coming to the L. of the stool below the table he places the pearls upon it.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*looking at them*). Beautiful, aren't they? (*She takes a cigarette from the box on the table.*)

ARTHUR. Want a light, darling? Please! (*Lights a match for her.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*R. of the stool, lighting her cigarette at the match ARTHUR is holding*). Thank you! (*Looks at him.*) I—

ARTHUR (*shaking out the match and putting it in ash tray*). You were going to say something?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*looking at his dressing-jacket*). Why the fancy dress?

ARTHUR (*looking at her coloured pyjama costume*). Well, I didn't want to feel out of it.

(*She picks up the pearls, hands them to ARTHUR, and sits on the stool below the bed.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. How did you find out, Arthur?

ARTHUR (*standing L. of table*). I recognized your—what is Charles to you, by the way?

MRS. CHEYNEY. My butler!

ARTHUR. Yes! I meant in his spare time?

MRS. CHEYNEY. My butler! (*Pause.*) How did you recognize him?

ARTHUR. I saved him from gaol once before!

MRS. CHEYNEY. You couldn't see your way to making a habit of it?

ARTHUR. I have always had a horror of doing the same thing twice!

MRS. CHEYNEY. I sympathize!

ARTHUR (*going to the stool in front of the dressing-table*). By the way, where is Charles at the moment?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*pointing to the window L.*). Underneath that window with a very bad headache, waiting for the aspirin! (*Indicating the pearls in ARTHUR'S hand.*)

ARTHUR (*smiling, sits on the stool by the dressing-table*). Forgive me being inquisitive, but are you married to him?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I'm nothing to him—except that we are in business together! (*Blows smoke to ceiling.*) What terribly nice cigarettes!

ARTHUR. I'll send you some!

MRS. CHEYNEY. That's sweet of you! I'll give you my address to-morrow—when I know it!

ARTHUR. Why? Are you thinking of changing your present one?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I have an idea that you may make it difficult for me to keep it!

ARTHUR. Ah! one always expects to pay a little more for a thing one wants enough!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Quite! But I don't think I want it enough to pay your price!

ARTHUR (*rising, goes to her L. hand and putting the pearls in his left-hand pocket*). But I have never mentioned it!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Haven't you?

ARTHUR. I confess I have been wanting to spend an evening with you like this ever since I knew you! I even offered you marriage.

MRS. CHEYNEY. But I refused!

ARTHUR (*kneeling L. of her*). You did! (*He puts his hand on her knee; she pushes it away.*) But surely the assumption is, you have changed your mind?

MRS. CHEYNEY. How clever of you! So, if I understand you rightly, if I agree to stay you say nothing!

ARTHUR. Nothing! Of course I shan't!

MRS. CHEYNEY. And if I don't?

ARTHUR. Oh, come, come, you wouldn't be so ungenial. What's the matter, Fay? (*He rises and goes to R. towards the head of the day-bed.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*looks at him, laughs*). That's an original way of punishing a crook! And only another crook could have thought of it!

ARTHUR (*leaning on the head of the day-bed*). Yes! It amuses you?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Immensely, but of course I know it shouldn't! In fact, I realize if I were really a nice woman I should hate you, but I don't; I feel rather flattered! There's something rather attractive in being locked in a room with a man, alone, even if it's against your will!

ARTHUR. I hate you to say that! Because the only reason I have locked the door is to prevent anyone coming into it, thereby saving you from explaining why you ever came into it!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*satirically*). Quite! As crooks go, do you know the difference between Charles and you?

ARTHUR. No?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Well, Charles robs with a charm of manner, and you rob with violence!

ARTHUR. That's not fair. I feel I am behaving most generously!

(*Pause.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Would you mind my sending a message to Charles?

ARTHUR. How do you propose to do that?

MRS. CHEYNEY. The lights have told him Mrs. Ebley is awake. All that he is waiting to know now is if I'm all right, or if I am discovered. The manner in which I pull those curtains is the signal.

ARTHUR (*coming to her a little*). Which of the messages do you propose to send him?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*rising*). I'm going to send him a message that I'm quite all right!

(*ARTHUR turns to the R. of the bed C. and sits on it.*)

(*She goes to the window L. and pulls the curtains slightly.*) There! (*Returning to L. of table below bed.*) Now the poor darling can go home quite happy! Open the bottle, Arthur dear! Let us all be happy!

ARTHUR. A good idea! (*He reaches for the bottle, starts to open it.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*standing L.C. by table*). Don't let it pop, for heaven's sake! Elton loves me so much he's not sleeping well, and he might think it a revolver shot and rush to my room to rescue me!

ARTHUR. Do you love Elton?

MRS. CHEYNEY. With only that bell to ring, would I be here with you if I did?

ARTHUR. True! (*The bottle opens quietly.*) Could anything be more quiet than that?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Nothing, but I expected it! You do everything marvellously, Arthur!

ARTHUR. Thank you, Fay!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Ever so little for me!

ARTHUR (*filling the glass leaning over the table from the bed*). Even with the knowledge of who you are, I still adore you!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*taking up the glass*). Is that an offer of marriage, or are you just being broad-minded?

ARTHUR. You know how often I have told you how I hate marriage! (*He puts the bottle on the table.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. True; and I must be content that you still adore me?

ARTHUR. Yes.

MRS. CHEYNEY. I should like to think, though, that you are a little disappointed in me!

ARTHUR (*shrugs his shoulders*). Your life is your own!

MRS. CHEYNEY. But how indifferent! (*She turns down a step on her L. to just below the stool.*) If I refused to stay here to-night, what would you do?

ARTHUR (*rising and moving round the foot of the bed to between her and the L. end of the stool*). I shan't let you go!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*takes a drink*). Now isn't that flattering! (*Turns to him.*) As you paid me the great compliment of asking me to be your wife, I wonder if it would interest you to know that as a woman who has done nearly everything there is to do in this world—this is one of the things I have never done.

(*He laughs.*)

Why do you laugh?

ARTHUR. I thought we had done with posing! (*He sits on the L. end of the stool.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. You don't believe me?

ARTHUR. What a fool you would think me if I did!

MRS. CHEYNEY. But it happens to be true!

(*He laughs.*)

Why should I say so if it weren't?

ARTHUR. Merely a trick to make me sentimental and open that door, that you may make a fool of me again! (*Laughs.*) I'm sorry, Fay!

MRS. CHEYNEY. To refuse to be your wife surely wasn't making a fool of you!

ARTHUR. You couldn't very well accept that!

MRS. CHEYNEY. I suppose not! You won't believe me when I tell you I have never done a thing of this sort before?

ARTHUR. Fay, my dear, why this stupidity? (*He rises, facing her.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. I can quite understand your not believing me. But I wish I could make you, though. I wonder how I can prove it to you?

ARTHUR. You couldn't; it's too difficult! (*He turns to the table, takes a cigarette and lights it at the R. of the stool, his back towards her.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. I suppose it is! (*Looks into her glass.*) Look, isn't that lucky, I haven't drunk it all!

ARTHUR. Why lucky? (*He turns to face her.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Because——

(*She throws the wine into his face. She retreats, frightened, to up L. He follows her threateningly.*)

ARTHUR (*up L. of the bed angrily but controlling himself*). And what does that mean?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*above ARTHUR near the wall up L.*). That means, if you don't believe that I have never done this before, you will at all events believe I am not going to do it now!

ARTHUR (*angrily*). Just as you like!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*pointing to bell-push at the R. of bed-head*). Ring that bell and tell Mrs. Ebley who I am, or unlock that door and let me go!

ARTHUR (*turning away from her, wiping his face and jacket with his handkerchief*). I shall do neither!

MRS. CHEYNEY. You can't keep me here against my will!

ARTHUR (*without moving*). I intend to.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Do you? Well, I prefer a million times that they should know what is true about me than you should believe what isn't! Open that door! (*She crosses to the door above the fire R.*) Open this door!

ARTHUR. Nothing in the world would induce me to!

(*MRS. CHEYNEY runs up R. by the bed. ARTHUR watches her without moving his position.*)

What are you going to do? Are you trying to persuade me you are going to ring the bell?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Unless you open the door!

ARTHUR. Why the bluff, Fay dear? It doesn't impress me in the slightest! (*Turning to L. of the bed and sitting on it. Laughs at her.*) You're much too sensible to take the risk of being the guest at Holloway, probably for five years.

MRS. CHEYNEY. You're wrong. Five years in Holloway wouldn't be nearly as long as one night with you! Give me that key! (*She reaches out to him.*)

(*He laughs, takes hold of her hand and tries to pull her to him. She struggles and releases herself.*)

Very well, then.

(*She rings the bell at R. at top of bed, which is heard ringing loudly.*)

ARTHUR (*amazed, but without raising his voice and remaining seated*). My God! do you realize what you have done?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Perfectly!

ARTHUR. Don't you understand, in a minute from now they will all come rushing into this room?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I do! (*Stops ringing the bell.*)

ARTHUR. What did you do it for?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*coming down R.C. to the R. corner of the head of the day-bed*). To give you an opportunity to tell them only the truth about me.

ARTHUR. You fool!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Evidently I had to be, in some form or other—I prefer this one.

(*There is a knock at the door R. above the fire. MRS. CHEYNEY retreats backwards up stage until she is on a level with the door up R.*)

ROBERTS (*outside*). It's Roberts, ma'am.

ARTHUR (*rising and pointing to the dressing-room door up R.*). Go in there quickly—I'll get rid of him. (*He crosses below the foot of the bed to top of day-bed R.*)

MRS. EBLEY (*heard off R.*). What is the matter, Roberts?

ROBERTS (*off R.*). My bell rang, madam.

MRS. EBLEY (*knocking on the door*). Arthur, Arthur, open the door at once.

ARTHUR (*going nearer to the door*). It's all right, my dear. Go back to your room; I'll come to you in a minute.

MRS. EBLEY (*speaking off*). I insist on your opening that door at once. Oh! Lord Elton.

ELTON (*off*). What's the matter?

MRS. EBLEY (*off*). Arthur's sleeping in my room. The bell rang—I can't think what's the matter.

MRS. CHEYNEY (*coming down to L. of the head of day-bed. Calling*). Mrs. Ebley!

MRS. EBLEY (*off*). Mrs. Cheyney!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*calling*). Lord Elton!

(ARTHUR *turns and looks at her.*)

ELTON (*outside*). Open this door at once, Dilling.

(ARTHUR *moves to MRS. CHEYNEY'S R. and looks at her and says :*)

ARTHUR. This is for remembrance!

(*He gives her a slap on the face. He then turns back to the door and opens it. MRS. CHEYNEY goes to L. by the dressing-table, crying. ELTON and MRS. EBLEY enter.*)

MRS. EBLEY (*pausing a second at the door with a rapid glance at ARTHUR, looks across L. and sees MRS. CHEYNEY. Moving to L.C. as she speaks*). What is the explanation of all this?

ELTON (*passing to C. by table below the bed and looking from MRS. CHEYNEY to ARTHUR*). My God!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Lord Dilling has something to tell you, Mrs. Ebley.

MRS. EBLEY (*turning a little down stage and to her R.*). What is it, Arthur?

(ARTHUR *comes down R. between the fire and the day-bed to the foot of it. He does not answer.*)

ELTON (*turning to ARTHUR*). What is it, do you hear?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*looking at ARTHUR*). Would you prefer that I tell them?

MRS. EBLEY. Arthur, do you understand? I insist!

ARTHUR. I'll tell you. I—I—persuaded Mrs. Cheyney to come into this room by false pretences. In the presence of you both, I humbly tell her I have behaved like a cad.

ELTON. Cad? You're the lowest thing I have ever known.

MRS. EBLEY (*terribly shocked*). I don't know what to say to you, Arthur. I had no idea you could ever do a foul thing like this.

ELTON. I was perfectly aware of it. (*To MRS. CHEYNEY.*) You will remember, in the letter I wrote you, I told you the type of man he was.

MRS. EBLEY (*putting her arm round MRS. CHEYNEY*). So, pretending you couldn't sleep and accepting my offer to change rooms, was merely a trick to get Mrs. Cheyney into it?

ARTHUR. Yes.

ELTON (*coming down a little*). Dilling, I for one will, and I hope every decent person in this world will, cut you. (*Turns from ARTHUR.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Everybody should—except the Insurance Company. They should love him.

MRS. EBLEY (*to MRS. CHEYNEY*). What do you mean?

(MRS. CHEYNEY *crosses to ARTHUR, R., takes the pearls from his L.*)

dressing jacket pocket and before he realizes what she is going to do returns with them to R. of MRS. EBLEY L.)

My pearls! What is the meaning of this?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*handing MRS. EBLEY the pearls*). It means—I came here—to—— I like them as much as you do.

(*A pause. MRS. EBLEY and ELTON look at her.*)

ELTON. My God! You mean you—were going to——?

(*MRS. CHEYNEY nods her head. ARTHUR turns to the R. side of the day-bed.*)

But there must be some mistake.

MRS. CHEYNEY (*shakes her head*). None.

MRS. EBLEY. I don't know what to say to you—I am bewildered, horrified! I prefer to deal with you in the morning. Please go.

(*MRS. CHEYNEY hesitates, she tries to say something. She turns and walks slowly across to ARTHUR. They face each other, ARTHUR R. of the day-bed; she L. He shakes his head, goes up and opens the door—she goes below and up R. of the day-bed and exits. ARTHUR closes the door.*)

(*To ELTON.*) I simply cannot believe it.

ELTON (*to DILLING*). She—there is no mistake!

(*ARTHUR coming to the top of the day-bed shakes his head. ELTON turns up to the L. of the table at the foot of the bed.*)

MRS. EBLEY. It's too awful, too terrible, too horrible (*crossing to ARTHUR*) Arthur! Did you take these, knowing that she——?

(*ARTHUR takes MRS. EBLEY by the arm and leads her towards the door.*)

ARTHUR. Let me advise you to go back to your room. It is so much wiser to discuss all this in the morning. Please; I'm sure I'm right. (*He opens the door for her.*)

MRS. EBLEY (*turning in the doorway*). Yes, I suppose so. Good night to you, or good morning, or whatever it is.

(*MRS. EBLEY exits. ARTHUR closes the door and comes to the R. end of the table.*)

ARTHUR (*to Elton*). You liked her, Elton?

ELTON. Liked her? Good heavens, man! I asked her to be my wife!

ARTHUR. With what result?

ELTON. I don't know yet.

ARTHUR. I sympathize. Sorry I can't offer you a drink, old feller. Oh, yes, I can. (*Pours out champagne.*) Have a drop of our fiancée's.

CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE.—*The Loggia, at Mrs. EBLEY'S house. The next morning.*

A long refectory table is laid for breakfast, on the veranda of the loggia, facing the audience. See illustration and plan.

(*Mrs. EBLEY is seated at the head of the table at the right. MARIA is at her left, facing the audience. ELTON is walking up and down at L. ROBERTS is standing R. of serving table up R.*)

MRS. EBLEY. I give it up—I simply give it up. Elton, what do you think?

(*ELTON signs to her to send ROBERTS away.*)

All right, Roberts, you needn't wait.

(*ROBERTS exits to L. through the windows.*)

Elton, what do you think?

ELTON. I don't know! I have no idea! I am defeated!

MARIA. We all are! But wouldn't you be wise to sit down? You'll tire yourself out!

ELTON (*sitting in the chair at table L. of MARIA*). When I think of her—the most modest—the most simple—the—the—the innocence of any knowledge of the world—no—no—I can't believe it!

MARIA. Nevertheless, the one woman of all the women in the world that you and Dilling have chosen to be your wife is a crook!

ELTON. I know! I know!

MRS. EBLEY. Do you love her very much?

ELTON. Yes! Yes! No! No! How can one love a woman of that description very much?

MARIA. I agree! And the way she trapped me into taking her up!

(*Mrs. EBLEY sits back.*)

What a fool I am going to look! Not only have I made the most ridiculous fuss of her, but with pride I have introduced her to every one I know!

ELTON. The way she has cheated us is too terrible! (*Bangs table.*) What are we going to do with her, I ask?

MARIA. Please don't make that noise, Elton! My nerves are in a dreadful condition already!





ELTON. I'm sorry!

MRS. EBLEY. I have been thinking for hours what to do with her! Her confederate, the man Charles, we will have no trouble with: he expects no sympathy. He arrived here early this morning and gave himself up! It's this woman! Our duty, of course, is to send her to gaol as well!

ELTON (*rising*). No, no, that is impossible! (*He goes to serving table B. and helps himself to food.*)

(*During the following scene ELTON eats.*)

MARIA. My view is, the man should go to gaol, and she be given the alternative of either going with him, or leaving for Australia by the next steamer! Obviously, she will accept the chance of going to Australia with alacrity, and that way we get rid of her for ever!

(*ELTON comes back to his chair with a plate of food and sits.*)

MRS. EBLEY. I am so angry I can only think of gaol for her.

(*MRS. EBLEY pours coffee for ELTON, which MARIA passes to him.*)

ELTON. Such a thing is out of the question. Think of my position in this matter! President of a hospital, President of the Lifeboat Institution, Chairman of various Societies for the protection of unhappy women—Director of a bank! (*To MRS. EBLEY.*) Do you realize that is only a few of the public appointments I hold?

MRS. EBLEY. I do! I do!

ELTON. A man who has regularly contributed to "The Times" on all questions of social reform, even subjects of religion! If it became known that I asked this woman to be my wife, will you tell me *what* subjects I will be able to write to "The Times" about?

MARIA. The Lifeboat!

ELTON. Quite!

MRS. EBLEY. But, after all, it's only her word against yours; you could deny having asked her to be your wife!

ELTON. The revolting thing of it all is, I cannot!

MARIA. Why?

(*Pause.*)

ELTON (*rising*). Being inexperienced and unacquainted with the manner one makes a proposal of marriage to a lady, I wrote it! (*Goes to table and changes his plate for fresh food.*)

MRS. EBLEY. My dear, how terrible for you!

(*MRS. EBLEY and MARIA exchange glances. They are very amused.*)

MARIA. Poor lamb, I see it's going to be very difficult for you, and, who knows, perhaps expensive!

(ELTON returns to his seat with an apple.)

ELTON (*sitting*). It was a letter teeming with affection and sentiment—it took me days to write it! Dilling says the cinema rights of it alone are worth ten thousand pounds!

MARIA. How dreadful! I am sorry for you!

MRS. EBLEY. A great pity, a great pity! (*Smothering her laughter.*)

ELTON. And that is not all! It pains me as much to tell you this as it will pain you to hear it; but I must be frank with you; it will make a breach between us all, but it is my duty to tell you — (*Pause.*) In that letter I wrote my personal opinion of you all!

(*They look at him.*)

MARIA. You wrote your—

MRS. EBLEY. Do I understand that you have put on paper anything which might sound in the least disparaging about me?

MARIA. Or me?

ELTON. As I intended to marry her, she being an Australian, I thought it my duty to point out to her the people I should like her to know or not, as the case might be.

(*MRS. EBLEY is about to make a remark, but MARIA anticipates her.*)

MARIA. Am I to understand we are among the “nots”!

ELTON. Yes!

MRS. EBLEY. How dare you!

MARIA. What are you doing in this house now?

ELTON. Unhappily, the answer to that is in the letter, too! I explained—

(*He passes his cup for more coffee, which MRS. EBLEY pours out from the coffee urn.*)

—to her that I had never visited Mrs. Ebley before, and the only reason I was doing so now was because she was going to be there! No, no sugar, please.

MRS. EBLEY. I am to sit here and be insulted like this! Can I do nothing? (*She absent-mindedly puts in piece after piece of sugar.*)

ELTON. No—no sugar, please. I do feel for you very much! You don't suppose, had I known this was going to develop, I should have written that letter, do you?

MRS. EBLEY. I imagine you capable of anything!

MARIA. You shouldn't be president of a hospital; you should be in one!

ELTON. I agree!

MRS. EBLEY. How did Arthur Dilling see this letter?

ELTON. We were up late talking last night—fortunately, being

a business man, I kept a copy of the letter. (*Takes it out of his pocket.*) It will pain you, but you had better read it!

(*He passes it to MARIA. MARIA offers it to MRS. EBLEY.*)

MRS. EBLEY. I don't want to read it! (*Takes the letter.*)

ELTON. I insist! It will convince you of the very difficult position we are all in with this woman!

MRS. EBLEY (*after reading, rises*). How dare you! How dare you! write a letter of this sort?

ELTON. Because I had no idea she was a woman of that sort!

MRS. EBLEY (*standing waving the letter*). You—you—do you realize, if this woman shows this letter written by you, my position in society is ridiculous and at an end?

ELTON. Perfectly! Dilling says if it were his letter, and he were her—he were she—he wouldn't sell it for twenty-five thousand pounds! We are in an extremely awkward position!

MRS. EBLEY. This is too terrible! (*She turns to MARIA'S R.*)

MARIA (*taking the letter from MRS. EBLEY*). How do I appear in this letter?

(*MRS. EBLEY goes behind MARIA to the windows o.*)

ELTON. Not well, I fear! (*Pointing to the place in the letter.*) There is the unhappy paragraph I wrote of you!

MARIA (*reads and starts up*). My God! I'm a fallen woman!

ELTON. No, no, you exaggerate! I only say—

MARIA. That I am in every way an undesirable person for her to know! That I—ho! if this is ever seen, I'm ruined! (*Sinks into her chair again.*)

ELTON. Precisely why I have shown it to you!

MRS. EBLEY (*to ELTON, coming to the table between him and MARIA*). You must get the original of this letter back, do you understand?

MARIA. At once!

ELTON. She refuses to give it back!

MRS. EBLEY. She refuses?

MARIA. Naturally. Would you in her place? It's worth thousands! (*She continues to read on.*)

ELTON. I went to see her personally, and told her if she returned it to me, I would forgive her everything!

MARIA. What did she say?

ELTON (*to MARIA*). She said she was keeping it until the rest of you had forgiven her, and her confederate Charles—(*to MRS. EBLEY*) whom she appears to be very concerned about!

MARIA. Would you tell me the object of telling us this at all? If you possessed the slightest decency you would have bought it back at any price to save our feelings!

ELTON. I would have, but when I explained to Dilling the delicate position I was in, that you were threatening to hand her

over, his view was that it would be better for you to read it in your own drawing-room, than have it read to you in a police-court!

MARIA. A police-court! Understand, Elton, I cannot openly quarrel with you at this moment, but the moment this is settled I will never speak to you again! (*She turns her back to him.*)

MRS. EBLEY. Neither shall I!

(*She goes through the windows into the house.*)

ELTON. That is perfectly fair!

MARIA. And, for God's sake, stop being pompous!

ELTON. Pompous! (*Rising.*) I forgive you, (*going down L.*) because you are unstrung!

MARIA. Unstrung! I could brain you!

ELTON (*down L.*). Dilling prepared me for this! He said this would happen! (*Walks up and down at L.*)

MARIA (*looking at him*). I have always believed, and I was right, that had I been your mother, I would have had you certified on the day of your birth!

MRS. EBLEY (*coming through the windows and sitting in chair L. of MARIA*). It seems to me, instead of putting this woman in gaol, where she ought to be, we'll all of us have to go on our knees with thousands of pounds begging her to keep out of it!

(*WILLIE enters by windows C. from L. ELTON is up stage L. at this entrance; he passes behind MRS. EBLEY and meets WILLIE at windows C.*)

WILLIE (*who is evidently trying to control himself*). Elton! What is it Arthur Dilling tells me you've written to Mrs. Cheyney about my wife?

ELTON. I'm sorry, Wynton, very sorry! But I must tell you the truth. I said that it was evident to me that she preferred always to be with some other man than her husband, and though I could understand it, I could not condone it—that is all I said! (*He turns to up L.*)

WILLIE (*C. ; to MARIA, unable to control himself*). He says that is all he said! And it's a lie! Kitty would rather be with me than any man!

ELTON. I'm sure she would; all I mentioned was, she never was!

WILLIE. I want to tell you this: it's a lucky thing for you it's a lady's honour that is concerned, otherwise I would take you outside and give you a damn good thrashing! (*He passes behind MRS. EBLEY and sits in the chair at the L. end of the table.*)

MARIA. I wish you would!

(*JOAN enters from windows C.*)

JOAN (*to MRS. EBLEY, coming between her and MARIA*). Darling, I can't open my mouth without swearing—I'm the foulest-tongued

woman in England; Mrs. Cheyney would be well advised not to know me; I belong to a small set of people who are making themselves ridiculous all over London! And lots more, darling!

(Crosses behind MARIA to MRS. EBLEY'S chair at the head of the table R. and sits.)

MARIA. That's nothing to the things he has said about others of us!

(MARY enters C.)

MARY. 'Morning, every one! *(Kisses MRS. EBLEY.)* 'Morning, Elton dear! *(C. between MARIA and MRS. EBLEY.)*

ELTON. 'Morning, Mary!

MARIA. Are you in the letter?

MARY. I am!

MARIA. What are you?

MARY. I'm a nice woman; aren't I, Elton darling?

ELTON *(at L. above WILLIE)*. That's what I said.

MARY. And quite right, I am!

(MRS. EBLEY rises and puts MARY into her seat L.C.—then goes to top R. corner of the table and pours out coffee for her.)

ELTON. I would like to be believed when I say that had I had the remotest idea there was the least chance of this letter ever being read or seen by anyone but Mrs. Cheyney, I would never have written it!

WILLIE. Oh, go to hell!

(ELTON moves down L., returning up L. of MARY at the corner of the table.)

JOAN. Why be so mild about it? *(To MRS. EBLEY, who is carrying coffee to MARY.)* Can I tell this bottle of Mellin's Food in my own way how and where he ought to go?

MRS. EBLEY. Certainly not!

(MRS. EBLEY turns to the serving table up R., and gets food for MARY and gives it her; she then returns to the R. corner of the table between JOAN and MARIA.)

MARIA. Whether you believed it would be seen or not, are those things you have written in that letter your opinion of us?

WILLIE. Yes! Are you prepared to withdraw the suggestions you have made against us?

ELTON. They are not suggestions; they are facts. What possible comfort could you derive from my withdrawing something all of you know to be true?

MARIA. Help! I'm starting a stroke!

(MRS. EBLEY turns to MARIA'S R. ARTHUR enters from up R. by the

side of the house, he comes to the corner of the table R. of MRS. EBLEY.)

ARTHUR. 'Morning!

MARIA. What are you?

ARTHUR (*very amused*). I? I have the distinction of being one of the most unmitigated blackguards walking about this earth!

MRS. EBLEY. Arthur, this is a dreadful position to be put in by this man!

ARTHUR. As an optimist, I take the gravest view of it!

MARIA. What are we going to do with this woman?

ARTHUR. Let us be accurate! What is this woman going to do with us?

MARIA. How true! How true! (*Picks up newspaper and throws it at ELTON.*) You beast! It's all through you!

ARTHUR. Steady! Steady!

(ROBERTS *enters from door at L.*)

ROBERTS (*coming below WILLIE at L.*). Can I speak to you a moment, Mr. Wynton?

WILLIE (*rising*). Yes, what is it?

ROBERTS. Your wife's maid wishes me to tell you, sir, nothing she can do will make your wife stop laughing!

ARTHUR. Who wants to stop her? We envy her.

WILLIE. Don't be funny about my wife having hysterics, Dilling! (*To ROBERTS.*) Tell her to try ice!

ROBERTS. Very good, sir!

(ROBERTS *exits at door L.*)

(WILLIE *goes up L.*)

ARTHUR. Let us all try ice! (*He crosses below the table to its L. end and sits in the chair vacated by WILLIE.*)

MRS. EBLEY. Can you offer no suggestion, Arthur?

ARTHUR. Certainly I can! There are two alternatives facing us. One, let us be English men and women, and hand her and Charles over to justice—in which case that letter may be read at the Old Bailey.

MRS. EBLEY	} (<i>together</i>).	{	No! No!
MARIA			Out of the question!
ELTON			Certainly not!

ARTHUR. Carried unanimously! The other: let us throw ourselves upon her mercy, and buy the letter back!

WILLIE (*coming down and standing behind ARTHUR'S chair*). And Elton pays for it!

ARTHUR. All those in favour?

ALL. Yes!

ARTHUR. Carried unanimously! Shall I settle the figure, or will you, Elton?

ELTON (*at L. of table above ARTHUR*). I am not a rich man, Dilling!

ARTHUR. You can't afford to be a poor one, Elton!

MARIA. I say, not one penny should be paid her until she is on the boat that will take her to Australia!

ARTHUR. Why?

MARIA. Because as long as she remains in England we are always at her mercy.

ARTHUR. True! True!

ELTON (*coming a little forward*). May I offer a suggestion?

ARTHUR. The man who pays certainly should!

ELTON. Then my view is this: we should not for a moment let her think that letter important. We should offer her her passage back to Australia, and in consideration of her returning the letter the matter is at an end.

MARIA. Don't keep on being an idiot! Do you think she will accept that?

ELTON. She will—if we tell her the other alternative is we will have her arrested!

ARTHUR. In other words, we put up a bluff that we don't care whether she has the letter or not, that it is unimportant.

ELTON. And, if necessary, I will say I never meant a word of it!

ARTHUR (*to them all*). What do you think?

MARIA. There is something in what he says!

MRS. EBLEY. And it does save our dignity a little!

MARY. Thank Heaven I'm a nice woman!

MARIA. Don't be vulgar, Mary; the only nice women in the world are the ones who have had no opportunities!

MARY (*rises with her plate*). You assume too much because I am able to keep my mouth shut! (*Goes up to serving table up R., helps herself to fruit and remains up R.*)

MARIA. Be quiet, and eat your breakfast.

ARTHUR. Business, please! The attitude you suggest we should take is, we are a lot of light-hearted boys and girls who don't care a damn; she either, as it were, coughs up the letter, consents to return to Australia, or we hand her over to justice!

MARIA. That sounds right to me!

MRS. EBLEY. It seems to me if we convince her we are determined people, it will have some considerable effect on her attitude!

WILLIE (*comes a little forward above ARTHUR at corner of table between ARTHUR and ELTON*). I say, I've got an idea! Supposing we send for one of those detective—ah!—inspector—er—a—police-man fellers—they can see him and he needn't know why he is here!

MARIA. That's a good idea!

MRS. EBLEY (*moving down R.*). That is an extraordinarily good idea; what do you think, Arthur?

ARTHUR. Yes!

ELTON. I know that's a good idea! It will prove that we are people who are not going to be trifled with!

ARTHUR. All those in favour of the policeman!

(All put their hands up.)

Carried unanimously! Willie, telephone for a policeman.

WILLIE. Right! What shall I say we want him for?

ELTON. Anything but the facts, of course!

WILLIE. You don't think because you are a damn fool every one else is! (*He goes down L. to below ARTHUR.*)

JOAN. Hear! Hear!

ARTHUR. Willie, tell him we don't like the look and are very suspicious of next year's asparagus!

(WILLIE moves up; he is just above ARTHUR when MARIA speaks and stops him.)

MARIA. Arthur, be serious. (*Irritably.*) Willie—oh, tell him we are suspicious of one of the servants— (*To MRS. EBLEY.*) Roberts won't mind!

WILLIE. Right! (*Goes up to windows C. behind ELTON.*)

(He exits C. and off L.)

ARTHUR. What's the next move?

MRS. EBLEY (*standing at the R. corner of table between JOAN and MARIA*). I suppose the next move is to send for these horrid people!

ELTON. Yes.

ARTHUR. Is it your pleasure that I put this proposition to Mrs. Cheyney, or would you prefer that Elton should?

JOAN. Good heavens, hasn't he made sufficient mess of it already?

MARIA. I should think so, indeed!

MARY. Joan, dear—Joan!

(JOAN rises and remains up R. at table with MARY.)

ARTHUR. Do you approve that I should, Elton?

ELTON. Please!

ARTHUR. Sybil, kindly ring the bell! (*To JOAN and MARY.*) I would ask you two to keep as quiet as possible; and if you would, Elton, I would ask you not for a moment to cease looking an English gentleman!

(MRS. EBLEY rings the bell on the lower R. corner of the table. ELTON sits in the chair L. of MARIA. MRS. EBLEY sits in chair at the R. end of the table. JOAN and MARY stand near the R. top corner of the table. WILLIE re-enters C. from L.)

WILLIE. It's all right. The chief inspector is coming himself.

(*He stands behind ARTHUR'S chair L.*)

ARTHUR. Good!

(ROBERTS enters from R., comes down side of the house R. to below MRS. EBLEY.)

ROBERTS, would you kindly ask Mrs. Cheyney if she would be good enough to join us here?

ROBERTS. Yes, my lord. (*He turns up R. of the table towards c. windows.*)

MARIA (*whispering across the table to ARTHUR*). What about the man—Charles—the man?

ARTHUR. Oh yes! (*Stopping ROBERTS, who is up c.*) Roberts! By the way, you might also tell Charles, who I believe is waiting downstairs, that I would like to speak to him for a moment!

ROBERTS. Yes, my lord! I believe Mrs. Cheyney and Charles are in the library, my lord.

MARIA (*to MRS. EBLEY*). Ah!

(ROBERT exits c. and off to L.)

ARTHUR. That, if I may say so, was rather delicately done! Let us pray!

MARIA. Oh, Arthur! Arthur!

ELTON. You will be firm, Dilling?

ARTHUR. Stand by me—be grateful that I am an unmitigated blackguard!

MRS. EBLEY. To me it's too terrible to think that instead of merely handing these people over to the police, we have to be clever with them to save ourselves!

ARTHUR. 'Ssh!

(MRS. CHEYNEY enters c. by the windows from L. She is closely followed by CHARLES. She walks to the back of the table at c. and stands as if in a court of justice. MARIA and ELTON turn their chairs inwards and a little back, to open stage. CHARLES remains behind at the windows slightly to the L. of MRS. CHEYNEY. MRS. CHEYNEY looks round at them all.)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*standing c.*). Guilty!

MARIA. Ah! you admit it!

ARTHUR. Silence! Won't you take a chair?

(ELTON rises, gives MRS. CHEYNEY his chair and stands behind it.)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Thank you! (*She sits down.*) As Charles was born a gentleman, mayn't he sit down as well?

ARTHUR. Of course! Take a seat, Charles.

CHARLES. No, thank you, Dilling!

MRS. CHEYNEY. I naturally expected it, but you sent for me?

ARTHUR. Quite! I will be brief, Mrs. Cheyney; the position is as follows: you have acknowledged frankly that in accepting Mrs. Ebley's invitation to stay here, it was for the purpose of taking Mrs. Ebley's pearls!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Or anything else that happened to be lying handy about.

ARTHUR. That is very frank. The penalty for such things is considerable!

MARIA. Very considerable!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Charles and I think with a charm of manner we may get off with three years!

ARTHUR. That, of course, we don't want to happen to you. Lord Elton feels very strongly that if you have once asked a woman to be your wife, it would be ungenerous to treat her so drastically!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Thank you, Lord Elton!

ELTON (*standing by and at L. of Mrs. CHEYNEY*). Er—er—not at all!

ARTHUR. So this is what we have decided! If you will accept your ticket and a small sum—you did mention the amount—Elton?

ELTON. A hundred pounds!

ARTHUR. Paid to you on the steamer, in return for the letter he wrote you, we are prepared to consider the matter closed.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Is it my turn now?

MRS. EBLEY. But, Arthur—I should like—

ARTHUR. Please, Sybil! (*He puts his hand up and stops her.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. I am very sorry that I cannot accept Lord Elton's kind offer, but Charles and I have decided we must go to gaol.

CHARLES. We have!

ARTHUR. After all, you did not succeed in getting the pearls!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Precisely. We failed, and that is why we should go to gaol. If we had got them we would have succeeded—a crime for which no one ever goes to gaol. (*She looks at MARIA.*)

CHARLES (*a little above Mrs. CHEYNEY on her R.*). You put it charmingly, Fay dear!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Thank you, my sweet!

ARTHUR. You didn't understand me. We don't want you to go to gaol!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Then, equally you don't understand us—we do!

ARTHUR. Quite!

(*There is a pause—they all look at each other.*)

MARIA. My good woman, you can't be serious when you say you want to go to gaol?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*to CHARLES*). Isn't it sad, Charles, they don't understand us!

CHARLES. Tragic! It makes me blush for them!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Charles and I in our humble way have tried to live up to the highest tradition of our profession—a profession in some form or other we are all members of—and that tradition is, never be found out—but if you are, I say if you are, be prepared to pay the price!

ARTHUR. I've got you!

(ROBERTS enters from R. outside the house and comes down R. to below
MRS. EBLEY.)

ROBERTS. Inspector Wilkinson has arrived, madam, who says you want to speak to him.

MRS. EBLEY. Ask him to wait.

ROBERTS. Yes, madam.

(He exits up R.)

MRS. EBLEY. You see, Mrs. Cheyney, we are terribly serious!

MRS. CHEYNEY. It's your duty to be, Mrs. Ebley!

MARIA. It seems to me you are a very stupid young woman not to accept such a good offer instead of being taken away by that horrid policeman!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Not at all—he may be charming! (She rises.)
Are you ready, Charles?

CHARLES. Yes, my sweet!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Your arm, Charles.

(CHARLES offers MRS. CHEYNEY his L. arm, which she takes and they move into the window turning so that MRS. CHEYNEY is O. with CHARLES on her L.)

Before we go, I would like you to know how pained Charles and I are at having, through our stupidity, put you to all this trouble. We feel it almost as much as the loss of your pearls, Mrs. Ebley.

CHARLES. And they are beautiful pearls, if I dare say so!

MRS. CHEYNEY (looking round at every one). And as I shall never see any of you again, I would like you to know how much I have enjoyed knowing you all, and how sorry I am to lose such nice friends. (Facing ELTON.) Good-bye, Lord Elton. It was sweet of you to ask me to be your wife. (Suggesting they shall go.) Charles?

(Turning to MRS. EBLEY, who makes a movement.)

Please don't bother to come down—we'll find the policeman. Good-bye!

(She turns a step up stage on her L. as if to go out O. to L., but CHARLES indicates that the policeman is to be found to the R. of the house. Understanding, she turns and takes CHARLES'S R. arm so that she is above him as they go. They walk together, arm in arm towards B.)

ELTON. Mrs. Cheyney!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*stops and circles round CHARLES, which bring them back to c.*). Yes?

ELTON. I—er—have something to say to you.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Yes, Lord Elton? (*Leaves CHARLES'S arm, coming a step beyond him.*)

MARIA. Come and sit down.

MRS. EBLEY. Yes, sit down.

MRS. CHEYNEY. But the policeman you sent for?

MARIA. Oh, damn the policeman!

MRS. CHEYNEY. But isn't it rather bad manners to even keep a policeman waiting?

ELTON. I—er—I wanted to say this—

MRS. CHEYNEY. I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I can't listen to anything you have to say, with a policeman waiting.

ELTON. Send that infernal fellow away!

MRS. EBLEY. What shall we tell him?

ARTHUR (*to JOAN*). Tell the policeman there has been a mistake, and we don't want him.

JOAN. Here, I don't want to miss any of this. Curse it!

(*She exits up B.*)

(*They all look at one another.*)

ARTHUR. Obviously, the bluff is over.

MRS. CHEYNEY (*sweetly*). Bluff? Have you been bluffing, Arthur? (*She moves and resumes her seat.*)

MARIA. You know perfectly well he has.

MRS. CHEYNEY (*innocently*). But why?

MARIA. Oh, do stop trying to be so innocent!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Do you know what they mean, Charles?

CHARLES (*coming forward c. a little*). I'm so young in crime I must be forgiven! I don't!

ARTHUR. Mrs. Cheyney, in a moment of impulse, prompted by affection for you, Lord Elton wrote a letter to you asking you to be his wife.

MRS. CHEYNEY. A letter which I will always treasure very much.

MARIA. We know that!

ARTHUR. I am authorized by Lord Elton to ask you your charge for the return of that letter.

MRS. CHEYNEY. My charge? Please forgive me, but I don't know what you mean!

ARTHUR. The suggestion is, we give you five hundred pounds—

(*ELTON moves down to above ARTHUR, looking horrified. ARTHUR dismisses him with a wave of the hand.*)

—and your passage to Australia.

MARIA. Which I call very generous.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Five hundred? Australia? I don't know that I would like Australia.

ELTON (*coming to Mrs. CHEYNEY and bending over her chair*). But you came from Australia.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Clapham!

(JOAN *re-enters from up R., runs down to R. end of table above MARY.*)

JOAN. What's happened?

ARTHUR. Ssh! Ssh!

MARIA. Come, come! What will you take?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I prize the letter so much that I don't think I would part with it for any money you could offer me.

MARIA. A thousand?

MRS. CHEYNEY. But this is amazing!

MARIA. Come, come, young woman! What is your usual charge for the return of letters?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*looks at her*). Speaking as one fallen woman to another, there never have been any letters; but if there had been, my charge would have depended entirely on the position and the manners of the people mentioned in it. (*She rises and stands with her hand on CHARLES'S L. arm.*) And as I don't propose to sit here and be insulted I will, with your permission, say good-bye!

CHARLES. You are perfectly right, Fay darling, and if I had known that they were the type of people they are, I should never have allowed you to come and stay with them!

ELTON (*up L. of Mrs. CHEYNEY*). Please, please! I agree; Lady Frinton was very hasty, and I'm sorry. Please sit down.

MRS. CHEYNEY. When she has apologized, I will.

CHARLES. Hear! Hear!

MARIA. I'll do nothing of the sort!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Very well. (*Starts to go off C.*)

MRS. EBLEY. Stop, please! (*To MARIA.*) Will you at once say you are sorry?

MARIA. I won't!

ELTON. I insist! You understand!

MARIA. My God! (*To Mrs. CHEYNEY, swallowing hard.*) I'm sorry!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*sits down again*). Granted.

CHARLES (*coming down to table C. between Mrs. CHEYNEY and MARIA, rubbing his hands*). We'd reached the point where a thousand pounds was bid for the letter.

ARTHUR. Which was refused!

ELTON (*L. of Mrs. CHEYNEY*). Mrs. Cheyney, what will you take for it?

CHARLES. I offer five thousand.

ELTON. Be quiet!

CHARLES. I'll do nothing of the sort! My money is as good as yours.

ELTON (*to Mrs. CHEYNEY*). Will you please answer my question?

MRS. CHEYNEY. If I sell the letter, I will do so not in the sense of blackmail, (*looks at him*) but more in the spirit of breach of promise, for ten thousand pounds!

CHARLES (*bending*). It's giving it away!

ELTON. Ten—no, no, I refuse!

MRS. CHEYNEY. I'm glad, because I would so much rather have the letter! (*She rises.*)

MRS. EBLEY. No, no! Elton, you have no alternative but to pay!

MARIA. And I have no sympathy for you!

ELTON. But, Mrs. Cheyney, surely—

MRS. CHEYNEY. Ten thousand, Lord Elton!

ELTON (*looks at them all*).—It's terrible, terrible!

CHARLES. Terrible be damned! I'll give eleven for it!

(ELTON *hurriedly takes a cheque-book out of his pocket, and goes into the house c.*)

JOAN. Ten thousand! Phew! (*To CHARLES.*) How much would you charge for a course of twelve lessons?

CHARLES. I never charge, m'lady; I'm a man who just loves his work.

MARIA. I hope you enjoy the spending of it, young woman.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Thank you, I'll do my best. (*To ARTHUR.*) What is your contribution to this, Lord Dilling?

ARTHUR (*very depressed*). I wish to be associated in Lord Elton's cheque for ten thousand pounds.

(ELTON *re-enters with the cheque; he comes down to the L. corner of the table to Mrs. CHEYNEY.*)

ELTON (*giving her the cheque*). The letter, please!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*looking at the cheque, turns to them all*). We have something in common, after all!

MARIA. Very little, thank heaven!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Then why pay this money to keep it a secret what we have?

MRS. EBLEY. Kindly give Lord Elton the letter!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Oh, yes! (*She tears the cheque into small pieces, and puts the pieces on the table.*)

(ELTON *takes a pace back.*)

CHARLES (*coming forward*). Fay!

MRS. EBLEY (*leaning forward*). What are you doing?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I'm doing what I did with the letter! I had

no idea it had any money value until you suggested to me yourself this morning that it had! (*She gives an envelope to ELTON.*) I hope you will find all the pieces there, Lord Elton!

ELTON (*taking it from her*). You——

CHARLES (*wiping his eyes with his handkerchief*). Forgive me! Ten thousand pounds gone down the drain; it's more than I can bear! And I have tried so hard to make her a crook.

ELTON. You've torn the letter up?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Wasn't it stupid of me?

ELTON. I think it was very generous——

MARIA. Nonsense. She wouldn't have torn it up if she had known she would have been offered that sum for it!

MRS. CHEYNEY. You're never right about anything. I tore it up after Charles told me it was worth twice that sum!

CHARLES. As I watched her tearing it up, I cried for the first time for fifteen years!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Poor sweet (*she puts her hand out; CHARLES takes it*), it was a cruel thing to do!

ARTHUR. Why did you tear it up?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I'll tell you. Courage, I was born with plenty (*looking at them all*); decency, they gave me too much!

MRS. EBLEY. Decency, indeed! If Lord Dilling hadn't rung that bell last night, decency wouldn't have prevented you taking my pearls!

ARTHUR. Lord Dilling didn't ring the bell; Mrs. Cheyney did!

ELTON (*to ARTHUR*). Mrs. Cheyney did? What do you mean?

ARTHUR (*to MRS. CHEYNEY*). Go on, tell them!

MRS. CHEYNEY. It will embarrass you!

ARTHUR. An unmitigated scoundrel is never embarrassed!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*sitting*). Very well! If it hadn't been for decency (*looking at MARIA and MRS. EBLEY*) I might be wearing your pearls—or others—at this moment, provided by Lord Dilling!

ARTHUR. Charmingly expressed; most touching.

MARIA. You mean to tell me you took the risk of being clapped into gaol, and rang that bell!

ARTHUR. She did!

MARIA. Nonsense, Arthur; it's sweet of you, but not fair to us to defend her like this!

ARTHUR. I give you my word of——

MRS. CHEYNEY. It's all right. I can understand her not believing it; I gathered from that letter, she didn't ring the bell——

(*General movement.*)

—and there was no risk of gaol!

MARIA. How dare you!

CHARLES (*puts his left hand on her right shoulder*). You're a grand woman, Fay, a grand woman!

MARIA. Be quiet, you horrid man!

CHARLES. Wrong again! I'm just a simple, tolerant, ordinary sort of feller, who only takes material things that can be replaced. How many of you can say that?

MARIA. Be quiet!

ELTON. There is one question I would like to ask—why are you a crook.

CHARLES. She isn't! But God knows I tried to make her one! I've taught her to take watches—the tie-pins she can remove like ——— (*Puts his hand to his tie, discovers his pin is not there.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY (*taking the pin from the lapel of her dress and handing it to CHARLES*). I took it as we came in.

CHARLES (*takes the pin*). Isn't she divine? She's the greatest expert I have ever known—but there is always a catch in the good things of life—she won't take them from the people she ought to!

MRS. CHEYNEY. You mustn't be angry with me, Charles; it's that decency that I'm cursed with that prevents me!

CHARLES (*putting his hand on her shoulder*). I couldn't be angry with you, my sweet!

(*She pats his hand. CHARLES puts the pin in his tie.*)

ELTON. What made you start this life, then?

MRS. CHEYNEY. You'll despise me, but I'll tell you! I wanted to improve my social position!

MRS. EBLEY. A curious way of doing it!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Not nearly so curious or so difficult as it would be by remaining a shop girl!

MARY. You were a shop girl?

CHARLES. In the stocking department!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Where he found me!

JOAN. You don't look like one!

MRS. CHEYNEY. There's a greater tragedy than that—darlings as they are, I don't think like one! So Charles was good enough to say that I was meant for better things—secretly in my heart I believed I was—but as a shop girl I realized there were no better things; loving beauty, nice people and everything that was attractive, I took the risk—I became a pupil of Charles.

CHARLES. The best I ever had!

MRS. CHEYNEY. And evidently I have made even a greater failure of it than I did as the shop girl!

ELTON. If I may say so, you have been very generous, and in—er—er—appreciation of your generosity I should be very happy to start you, if you would allow me to, in some—er—er—shop of your own!

MRS. CHEYNEY. You would, Lord Elton?

ELTON. Very!

JOAN. That's divine of you! (*To Mrs. Cheyney.*) I'll be a customer!

MARY. I certainly will!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*to MARIA*). I would like to think I would have your patronage!

MARIA. You know you've got to have it!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*to ARTHUR*). I hope you will persuade some of your many lady friends to buy from me?

ARTHUR. I will do more than that! From the first moment the shop opens, Elton and I give you our word of honour we will never wear anything but women's underclothes! And quite frankly, I always believed Elton did! I apologize, Elton.

ELTON (*smiling a little*). Mrs. Cheyney, you know my address. As soon as you decide, please let me know. I shall be very happy to be of any service to you!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*rising*). I'm very grateful, Lord Elton! (*Offers her hand.*)

ELTON. Please! (*Taking her hand.*) And if I'm not being too modern, I should like to say good-bye.

(*He exits into the house up c.*)

MARIA (*rises and goes c. between CHARLES and Mrs. Cheyney*). If you are going, Elton, you can give me a lift. (*Puts out her hand to Mrs. Cheyney.*) You don't deserve it, but I'll give you a luncheon party and ask every one the day the shop opens!

MRS. CHEYNEY. You're an angel!

MARIA (*turns to CHARLES*). Occasionally I give little dinners to lawyers, politicians and Members of Parliament. We have a little bridge afterwards—perhaps we might arrange to cut as partners. (*Offers her hand to CHARLES. They shake hands. CHARLES smiles, indicating "I'll see to that, m'lady."*)

(*MARIA exits in house c. and off L.*)

MARY (*coming from R. to c. between CHARLES and Mrs. Cheyney. To Mrs. Cheyney*). I'll be at the luncheon party. (*She waits up c.*)

WILLIE (*coming up c. to L. of Mrs. Cheyney—she turns to him*). Whenever my wife and I have a row and I have to give her a present, I'll come to your shop for it.

MRS. CHEYNEY. I like you so much, I'm glad I'm going to be seeing you every day.

WILLIE (*mentally slow*). Oh—yes—ah, ah! I see.

(*MARY and WILLIE go off in house to L.*)

JOAN (*coming from R. to between CHARLES and Mrs. Cheyney*). I adore crêpe-de-chine! Get quantities; the world is full of young men who want to buy me something.

MRS. CHEYNEY. You're a terribly nice girl.

JOAN. Say "Joan," and I'll believe you.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Joan.

(They shake hands.)

JOAN *(turning to CHARLES)*. If ever you want a pupil, Charles, you'll find my number in the telephone book.

CHARLES. I shall never want a pupil, m'lady—but I'm glad I shall find your number in the telephone book.

(She laughs. They shake hands.)

JOAN. So long.

(Exit in house C. and off L.)

MRS. EBLEY *(rising)*. Well—I must go and see these people off. Arthur—perhaps you had better keep your eye on the spoons.

(They all laugh.)

(MRS. EBLEY exits up the side of house R.)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Oh! *(To CHARLES, taking off her hat which she puts in the C. of the table.)* Nice people, aren't they, Charles?

CHARLES *(going down R.)*. Most of us are, Fay darling!

(MRS. CHEYNEY sits on C. of table, her back to audience.)

ARTHUR. What made you take up this job, Charles? With your brains, it seems a pity you haven't used them to better purposes!

CHARLES. One of His Majesty's judges may use those exact words one of these days. I found out, at an early age, what most men find out in an old one—life is very dull, my lord!

ARTHUR. I agree!

CHARLES *(by chair at R. end of table. To ARTHUR)*. But I have an excuse. When I was thirteen years of age a trustee sent me to Eton, where I remained for five years wondering why I hadn't been sent to Harrow! From there, for another three years I was sent to Oxford, where I remained wondering why I hadn't been sent to Cambridge! With the result that, at the early age of one-and-twenty, I found that life and I were two dull things. So I decided to take it into my two hands: I began it as a blackmailer! But that was too easy—the world is so full of honest people that whenever you said "I know all," they parted with such alacrity that this became even more dull than the world and myself! So I went for higher and greater things! *(Coming down round end of table a little to C.)* I hate parting with it, my lord, because, being the first I ever took, I treasure it; but there is your gold watch I took from you on Derby Day five years ago!

ARTHUR. My dear Charles, I've always wanted to meet the man who took it, and I hope you will do me a favour—keep it!

CHARLES. May I?

ARTHUR. I'd like you to!

CHARLES. That is very nice of you—I will! So long, Dilling!

ARTHUR. So long, Charles!

(CHARLES goes round R. end of table to R. of MRS. CHEYNEY.)

CHARLES. Good-bye, my sweet!

MRS. CHEYNEY (*rising, standing c., facing CHARLES*). What do you mean by good-bye?

CHARLES (*taking her by the shoulders*). What it means is, I have decided to take a little trip round the world!

MRS. CHEYNEY. You're not going to leave me, do you understand!

CHARLES. I am, and now.

MRS. CHEYNEY. But I don't want you to!

CHARLES. I must!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Why?

CHARLES. Whenever you come into a person's life, come into it instantaneously; when you go out of it, go out of it even quicker! Good-bye, my love!

(He gives a look at ARTHUR; they exchange a sympathetic wink—they don't want her to break down.)

MRS. CHEYNEY. Charles, I'm going to cry!

CHARLES. Don't do that, my sweet; but I would be terribly sorry if you didn't want to!

MRS. CHEYNEY. Please don't go—come and be my manager!

CHARLES. No use—I'd have to be honest, and it would bore me!

ARTHUR. Are you going round the world for pleasure, Charles?

CHARLES (*imitating dealing cards*). Mixed with business, my lord!

(He looks at MRS. CHEYNEY, blows her a kiss.)

(Exit CHARLES up R. of house.)

ARTHUR. Next to going round the world with the woman one loves, I can think of nothing more attractive than going round it with Charles.

MRS. CHEYNEY (*coming down to R. of table*). You would enjoy it—you have so much in common.

ARTHUR. I agree. You liked him?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I adored him.

ARTHUR. How much is that?

MRS. CHEYNEY (*coming R. in front of table*). As much as a woman can like a man she is not in love with.

ARTHUR. Like to go with him?

MRS. CHEYNEY. I'd hate to.

ARTHUR. I'm going to ask you a question ; you needn't answer if you don't want to.

MRS. CHEYNEY. I'll answer it with pleasure—if Mrs. Ebley had been in the room last night and not you, I should have taken them.

ARTHUR. You mean that ?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Yes ! But of all the women you have ever known, none has ever been so glad to see you in a bedroom as I was last night.

ARTHUR. Thank you, Fay.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Not at all—you made an honest woman of me.

ARTHUR. I've always believed that most of the good things done in this life were unintentional.

MRS. CHEYNEY. I wonder.

ARTHUR. Fay !

MRS. CHEYNEY. Yes, Arthur.

ARTHUR. It's an extraordinary thing, but the most difficult question in the world to ask a woman is a nice one.

MRS. CHEYNEY. What sort of question were you going to ask me ?

ARTHUR. I was about to describe my hopeful contribution to your future.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Please do ; I'm interested.

ARTHUR. Well, after you left me last night I couldn't sleep, so very early this morning I dressed myself, got out my car and went to see a friend of mine, who is a bishop, with whom I had breakfast at eight o'clock this morning.

MRS. CHEYNEY. How surprised he must have been to see you.

ARTHUR. I described to him in detail a little trouble I was in—he listened so sympathetically—when I had finished, he looked at me and said, " If you'll give me a cheque for fifty pounds and bring her with you and be here at eleven o'clock this morning, I'll fix it for you."

MRS. CHEYNEY. What was he to fix for you ?

ARTHUR. That I could have breakfast with you at eight o'clock to-morrow morning.

MRS. CHEYNEY. I never eat any.

ARTHUR (*rising, going below table L.C.*). I told him there was a possibility of that.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Tell him anything else ?

ARTHUR. I loved you.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Did he believe you ?

ARTHUR. He covered his eyes with tears.

MRS. CHEYNEY. He was right to—tell him anything else ?

ARTHUR. I told him that when I thought over my past life—the weakness, the dishonesty of it all, I wondered if any really nice woman could ever take tea with me.

MRS. CHEYNEY. He agreed ?

ARTHUR. Mildly.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Did you tell him about me? (*She moves nearer c.*)

ARTHUR. Everything. (*He moves nearer her.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. What did he say?

ARTHUR. He said, "Get her; you'll never get another like her!"

(*They are together c.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. I don't believe even a bishop said that.

ARTHUR. I'll swear.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Still, I don't believe you. I've a good mind to come with you and ask him, myself.

ARTHUR. I said we would be there at five minutes to eleven.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Oh! Does he think I'll come?

ARTHUR. He's more certain of it than I am.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Why?

ARTHUR. He says you love me.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Really? I wonder what makes him think that?

ARTHUR. I don't know. He's an idea that you would never have rung the bell last night if you hadn't.

MRS. CHEYNEY. What a darling he sounds—I'd rather like to meet him.

ARTHUR. He asked us to be punctual.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Do you think he'll like me?

ARTHUR. A bishop is never allowed to leave his wife—my dear, he'll adore you.

MRS. CHEYNEY. Do you?

ARTHUR. Terribly! What is more important, do you?

MRS. CHEYNEY. Much more terribly—I wish, though, that——

(*He stops her speaking.*)

ARTHUR. Ssh!

(*He kisses her on the eyes.*)

MRS. CHEYNEY. What's that?

ARTHUR. That is the last of Mrs. Cheyney.

MRS. CHEYNEY. I'm so glad.

(*He embraces her and kisses her on the lips.*)

What's that?

ARTHUR. That's the beginning of Lady Dilling.

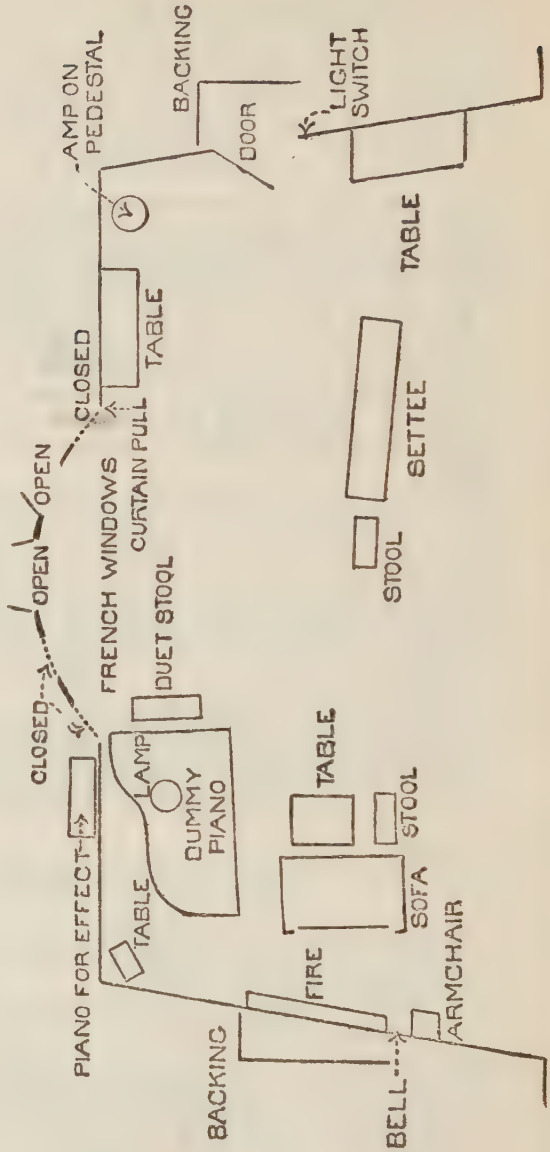
MRS. CHEYNEY. Beast! You're never happy unless you make me cry.

CURTAIN.

BROKEN-WHITE PANELLED DRAWING-ROOM

PIANO FOR OFF STAGE SONG

CLOTH - GARDEN SLOPING TO RIVER AT CORING ON THAMES
SUMMER LATE AFTERNOON.



ACT I

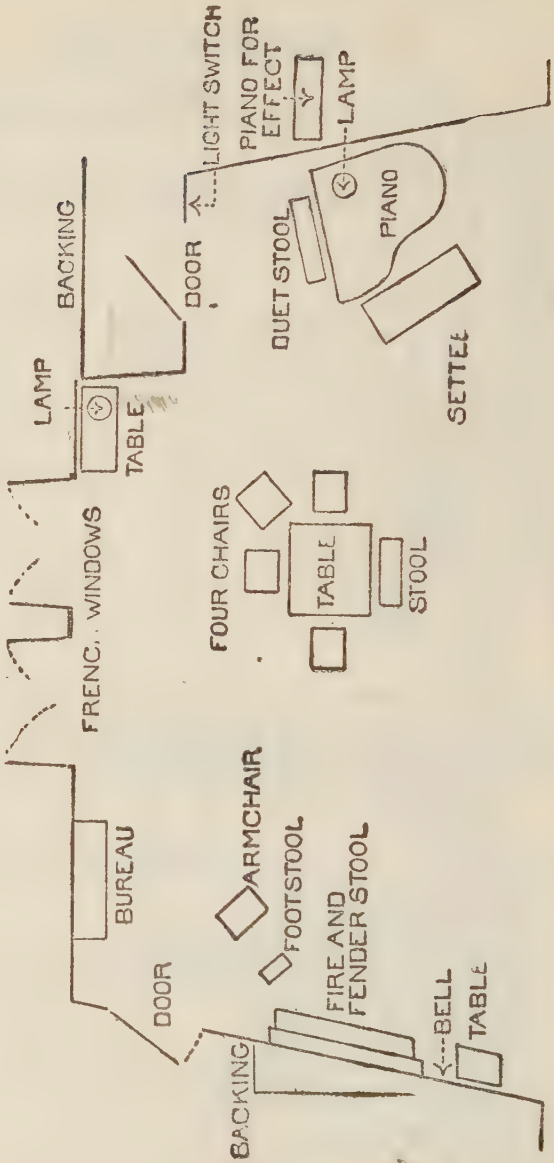
FURNITURE PLOT

ACT I

- Grey pile carpet all over stage (remains throughout Acts I and II).
Persian rug at fire.
Persian rug at window.
Persian rug below and in front of settee L.
Patterned crotonne curtains (to pull all over windows) on practical cord at L.
Pelmet to match.
Net blinds to windows.
Rods for same.
Mirror over the mantel.
Queen Anne settee (down L.).
Lounge sofa (up and down facing fire R.).
Grand piano (up R.).
Queen Anne arm-chair (below fire R.).
Sofa table (up L. at back).
Walnut chest (down L.).
Small table (in corner up R.).
Small walnut table (by sofa R.).
Stool (below small table R.).
Duet stool (at piano).
Wooden pedestal (up L.).
Flower picture (over mantel R.).
On piano.—Embroidered cover.
 Mirror in silver frame.
 Standard lamp.
 Book at back.
 2 novels.
 Ash tray.
On sofa R.—2 cushions.
 1 novel.
On small table (up R.).—Bowl of dark red rosebuds.
On small table (behind sofa).—2 tins of cigarettes.
 1 large box of matches.
 Silver cigarette-box.
 Silver ash-tray.
 Match tray.
On Walnut Chest (down L.).—Large silver tea-tray.
 Large silver sugar-basin.
 Two silver milk-jugs.
 9 afternoon cups and saucers.
 Large blue vase of pink delphiniums.
On sofa table (up L.).—2 property cakes in silver cake-baskets.
 1 property cake in cake-plate.
 Fruit in silver fruit-basket.
 Cut-glass decanter of wine.
 Biscuits and wafers in cake-plate.
 Chocolate éclairs in cake-plate.
On pedestal (up L.).—Standard lamp.
On mantel.—Clock.
 2 Italian wooden boxes.
Fire-arms in grate.

GREEN-PANELLED ROOM

GARDEN CLOTH NIGHT



ACT I I S C I

ACT II

SCENE 1

2 pairs green velvet curtains.

Pelmets to same.

Net blinds to windows.

Grand piano (at L.).

Small lounge settee (below piano).

Arm-chair (at fire R. with footstool in front of it).

Fender stool at fireplace.

Card table (c.).

4 Hepplewhite chairs (at card table).

Stool (below card-table).

Duet stool (at piano).

Walnut bureau bookcase (up R. at back).

Small table (in angle L.C. at back).

Small table (below fire R.).

Persian rug (at fire R.).

On piano.—Embroidered cover.

Standard lamp.

Silver cigarette-box.

Matches.

Ash-tray.

Book of music.

Bowl of tea roses.

“Evening Standard.”

On card table.—2 packs of cards.

2 bridge markers.

2 ash trays.

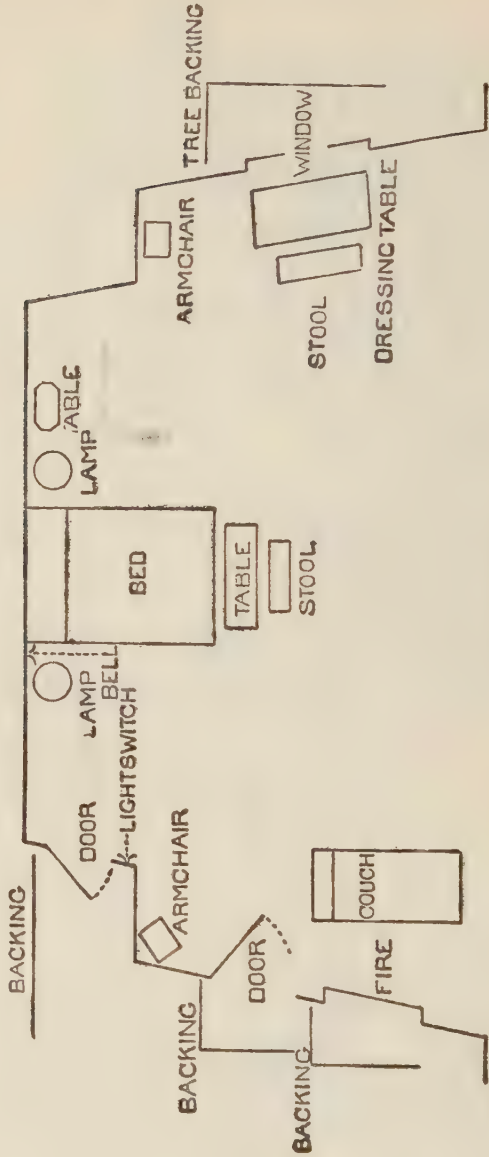
Matches.

On small table (up L.C.).—Tea caddy.

Standard lamp.

On small table (below fire).—12 large coloured shell flowers in Japanese vase.

BROKEN-WHITE BED-ROOM



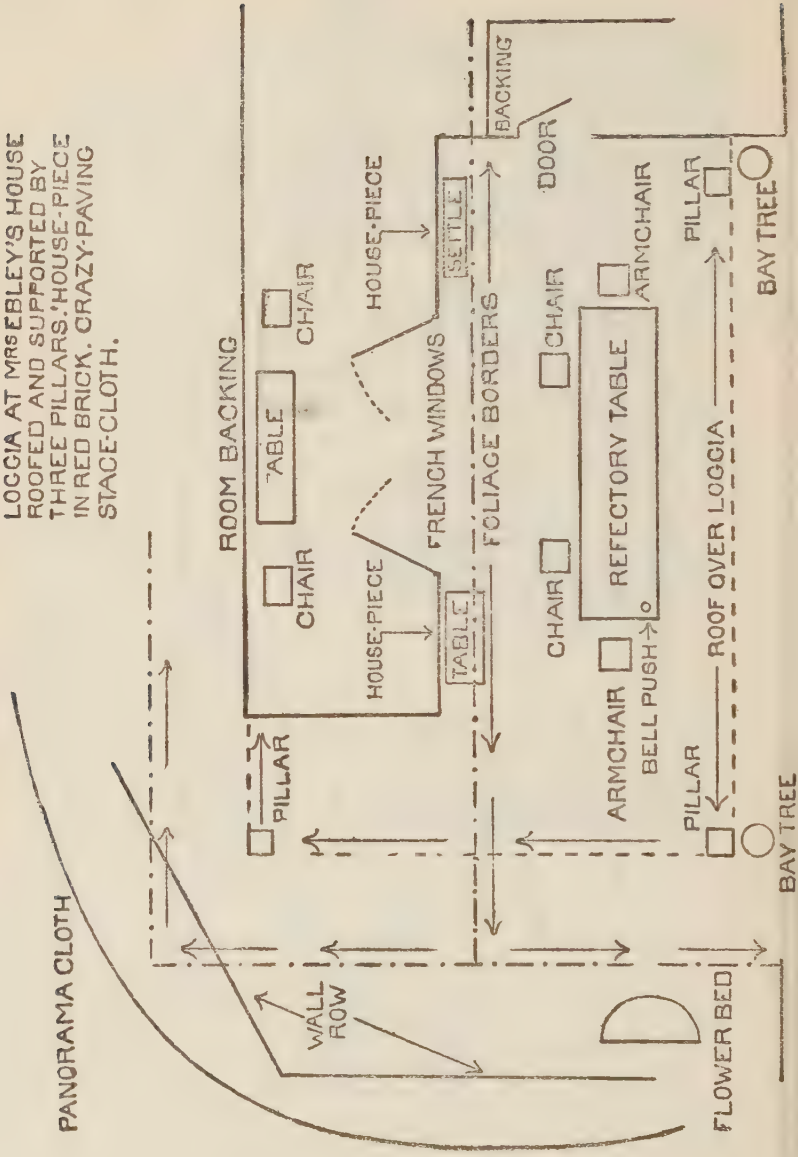
ACT II, SC. II

ACT II

SCENE 2

- Silver plush curtains on windows (L.).
 Silver embroidered pelmet right round scene.
 Persian rug (at fire R.).
 Silver Italian carved bed (c. *at* back).
 Marble-top dressing-table (L.).
 Day-bed (at fire R.).
 Yellow-painted Italian arm-chair (in angle R.).
 Yellow-painted Italian arm-chair (above window L.).
 Small octagonal table (L. of bed).
 Table (covered orange plush) (at foot of bed c.).
 Stool (R. of dressing-table).
 Stool (below table c.).
 Sun-Ray clock (over fireplace).
 2 tall carved pedestal lamps (R. and L. of bed).
On bed.—2 pillows lace embroidered.
 2 sheets lace embroidered.
 Gold and silver embroidery bedspread.
 Pair of pyjamas.
On small table (L. of bed).—2 books.
 2 Italian boxes.
 Orange plush cover on table.
On dressing-table.—Embroidered runners.
 Mirror in silvered wooden frame.
 Bowl of yellow roses.
 2 candle fittings and shades.
On table (below bed).—Italian wooden tray.
 Pint bottle of champagne (cork to draw).
 1 champagne glass.
 Entrée dish of sandwiches.
 Cigarettes in Italian box.
 Matches.
 Ash-tray.
On couch (by fire).—2 cushions.
 Book.
In door (down R.).—Key.
 Bell-push (on flat R. of bed).
 Light switch (below upper door R.).
 Pearl necklace (for LORD DILLING).

LOGGIA AT MRS. EBLEY'S HOUSE
ROOFED AND SUPPORTED BY
THREE PILLARS. HOUSE-PIECE
IN RED BRICK. CRAZY-PAVING
STAGE-CLOTH.



ACT III

Refectory table (c.).

Oak serving-table (up E.).

Oak settle (up L.).

2 basket arm-chairs (E. and L. end of table).

2 basket single chairs (behind table c.).

Cushions to all chairs.

Plush damask window curtains (to house).

2 small bay trees in tubs (E. and L.).

2 strips of coco-nut matting in front and up E. side of house.

In house.—Sofa table (from Act I).

2 small chairs (from Act II, Scene 1).

Japanese vase of chrysanthemums.

On serving table.—6 breakfast plates.

6 fruit plates.

Hot plate containing 2 entrée dishes in brown ware, 1 entrée dish in silver ware.

Bowl of fruit—entrée dish of "poached" eggs.

On table c.—Places laid for six persons.

6 butcher-blue serviettes.

Silver coffee urn (coffee made).

Silver cream-jug.

Silver sugar-basin.

6 breakfast cups and saucers.

Bowl of marigolds.

HAND PROPERTY PLOT

ACT I

On Stage

- On piano up R.*—2 novels.
Music.
Mirror in frame.
Standard lamp.
- On sofa R.*—Novel and 2 cushions.
- On small table R.C.*—Silver cigarette-box.
Ash-tray—*with ash on it.*
Empty match stand.
2 tins of cigarettes.
Large box of matches.
- On table down L.*—Tray containing 9 cups and saucers, cream-jug, sugar-basin.
- On table up L.*—2 cakes in silver cake-baskets.
Fruit in silver cake-baskets.
1 cake on cake-plate.
1 plate of biscuits.
1 plate of éclairs.
Decanter of wine.

Off Stage

- Off L.*—On small silver tray: 2 plates of sandwiches.
On large silver tray: 6 tumblers, 6 wine glasses, 1 decanter whisky—
(to drink), claret in jug, cyder in jug, syphon in stand.
On salver: Teapot (tea made), hot-water jug, cigar (for CHARLES),
cigarettes and matches (for WILLIAM), newspaper (for GEORGE).
- For ARTHUR.—Treasury notes in case.
For MRS. WYNTON.—Pearls.
For CHARLES.—Gold watch.
For JOAN.—Cigarette in holder.

ACT II

SCENE 1

On Stage

- On card table.*—2 packs of cards.
2 bridge markers.
2 ash-trays.
Matches.
Small box of cigarettes.
- On piano L.*—"Evening Standard."
Music.
Cigarettes and matches.
Ash-tray.
- For MRS. EBLEY.—Work.
Pearls.

Off Stage

- Off* R.—1 tumbler of whisky and soda (to drink).
 1 tumbler of barley water (to drink).
 2 tumblers of whisky and soda (to drink).
Off L.—Small parcel in special envelope (for CHARLES).

SCENE 2

Clock Strike off R.—3 o'clock.

On Stage

On table c.—*On small tray*: Small entrée dish of sandwiches, bottle of champagne (to open and drink), 1 champagne glass, cigarettes, matches, ash-tray.

For ARTHUR.—Pearls.
 Book.

In door, R.—Key.

ACT III

On Stage

On table c.—*On large tray*: Coffee in urn (to drink), hot milk, sugar (lump), 6 cups and saucers, plates, knives, forks, serviettes, newspaper.

Knives, forks, small plates, cups laid for 6.

2 toast racks of toast.

Butter dish.

Marmalade jar, etc.

On service table O.P.—Hot plate.

4 entrée dishes (food).

Bowl of fruit.

10 plates.

4 large spoons and forks.

For MRS. CHEYNEY.—Tie pin.

Torn letter in envelope.

Handbag.

For CHARLES.—Gold watch.

For LORD ELTON.—Written letter.

Cheque-book.

Fountain-pen.

Off L. (*in house*).—Cheque (for LORD ELTON).

ELECTRICS PLOT

ACT I

Floats.—Amber, 1 circuit } *Full up.*
white, 1 circuit }

Battens.—No. 1, amber-white circuit } *Full up.*
No. 5, white circuit }

Spot Batten.—No. 1, 6 500-watt lamps, amber.

Front of House Projectors.—1 amber, 1 pink.

U.S.O.P.—2 1,000-watt flood boxes on back cloth.

U.S.P.S.—2 1,000-watt flood boxes on back cloth.

D.S.P.S.—1 small length in doorway 2 L., amber.

2 two-light brackets over mantelpiece.

1 standard lamp on piano O.P.

1 standard lamp on table P.S.

1 dummy switch by door P.S.

1 dummy bell-push by fire.

At cue from Mrs. CHEYNEY: "Possessing a sense of humour":

Slowly check floats, battens No. 1-5 also.

Front projectors leaving spot batten full.

This check takes approximately 5 minutes.

At cue: When WILLIAM switches on lights:

Full up on floats, No. 1 batten, projectors, also brackets, standard lamps.

Stands to finish of Act.

ACT II

SCENE I

Floats.—Amber, 2 circuits.

Battens.—No. 4, blue.

Spot batten.—No. 1, 4 lamps, amber.

Front of House Projectors.—1 amber, 1 pink.

1 18-inch strip Zinolight over keyboard of piano lighted.

1 small length in O.P. doorway.

1 small length in P.S. doorway.

2 two-light brackets over mantelpiece O.P.

1 two-light bracket centre of panels P.S.

1 standard lamp on piano P.S.

1 standard lamp on table U.S.P.S.

1 log fire (practical).

Full up all through scene.

Quick change.

SCENE 2

Floats.—Amber, 2 circuits.

White, 1 circuits.

Front Projectors.—1 amber, 1 pink (on after B.O.).

2 floor standard lamps at head of bed U.S.

2 table standard lamps on dressing-table.

Dog-Fire (alight all through).

1 small length in doorway O.P.

1 1,000-watt flood-box on window backing P.S.

1 dummy bell-push by bed.

1 dummy switch by O.P. door, up stage.

Full up to open.

At cue: When LORD DILLING goes to switch: Black out all but fire.

At cue: When LORD DILLING switches on again: Full up as before.

To end of Act.

ACT III

Floats.—All circuits full up.

Batten.—No. 1, full up.

Spot Batten.—2 lamps on table centre.

Front Projectors.—Both pale amber.

2 small lengths in house piece L.P.S. and 1 O.P.

2 1,000-watt flood-boxes U.S.O.P. on (Panoram).

2 1,000-watt flood-boxes D.S.O.P. on (Panoram).

1 1,000-watt flood-boxes D.S.O.P. on table.

3 1,000-watt flood-boxes hanging under fly floor to illuminate top of Panoram.

Full up all through.







KQ-525-391

